THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

# THE BEACH BOYS

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Every album reviewed

Amazing interviews – found!

Foreword by AL JARDINE

Afterword by BRUCE JOHNSTON

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## Good Vibrations!

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BEACH BOYS: ON SCREEN

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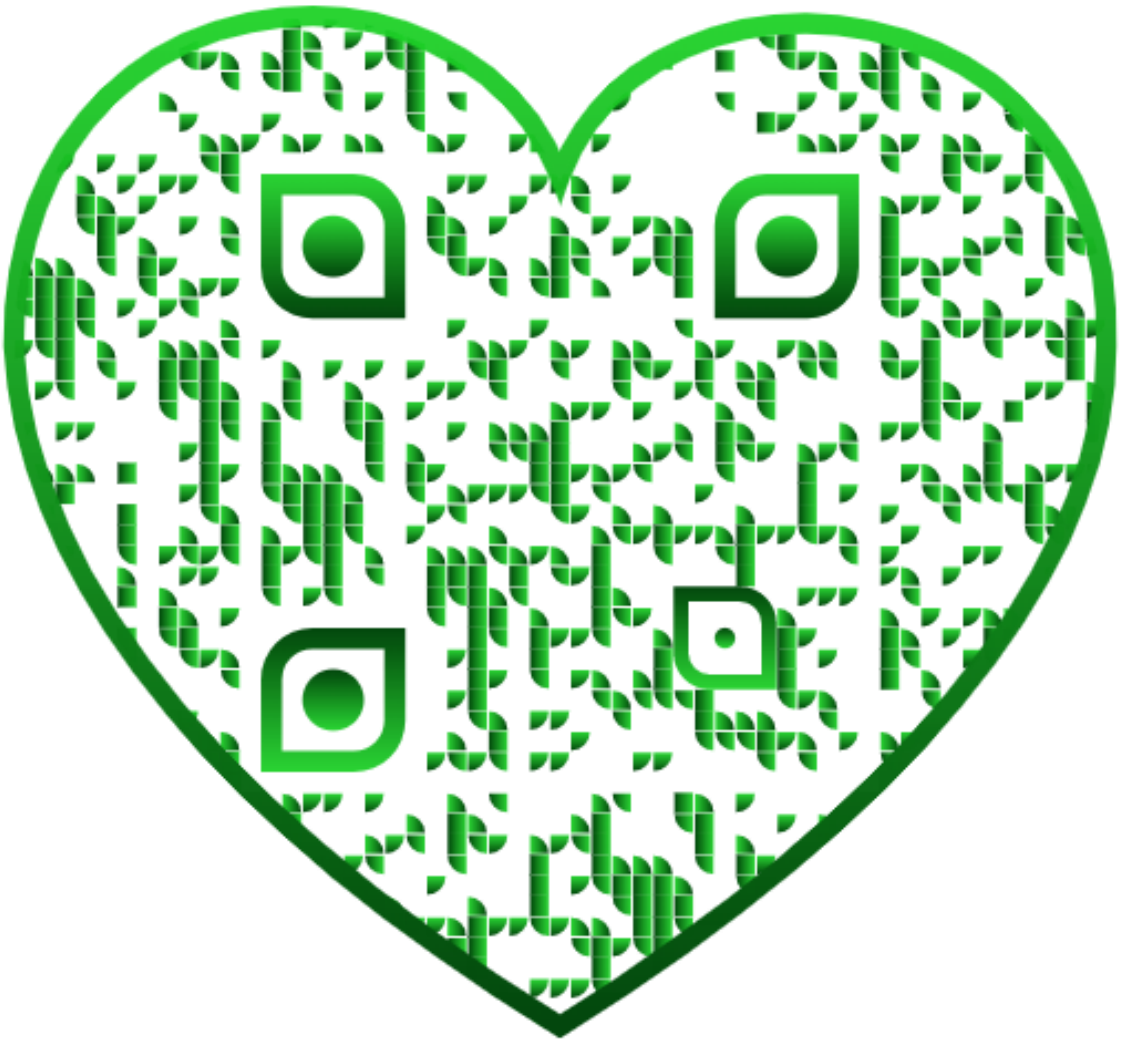

THE BEACH BOYS FOREWORD

# "We were always better with Brian"

**AL JARDINE**, uncommitted student dentist and original Beach Boy introduces our *Ultimate Music Guide*...

IT WAS KIND of all of our idea to start The Beach Boys. My first impressions of Brian were that I appreciated his love of harmony, his love of The Four Freshmen, and I reciprocated with my love of folk music. It was nice meeting with somebody on a musical level. We fell in love with doo-wop and the rock'n'roll of the '60s. We kinda met in the middle somewhere and it was beautiful.

Brian introduced me to his family, his brothers and cousin. I did badger Brian a little bit about getting together. He'd get his brothers to come – Carl was only 12 years old at the time, he was just taking guitar lessons but he caught on pretty quick. Mike and Brian and I were already into doo-wop and we loved all those great harmonies and great songs that were on the radio at the time, so we were really compatible. Dennis didn't play anything – he had to learn to play the drums. I rented the drums for him to play, and the bass guitar that I played on the first song that we recorded. None of us really played, we had to learn our instruments.

The screaming started and Brian became overwhelmed by it. I'd spent a period out of the band because I had intentions to finish my degree, but Brian decided he wanted to do music full-time and I could see why, because he started having success with the band. I got a phone call [*in 1963*] and he said, "Man, I can't handle the pressure, please get your butt back in the band," and I said, "Okay." By then I had pretty much finished what I started out to do at college, so it kinda worked out for both of us. Two days after that phone call I was at the airport for the very first tour of the United States. It worked out great for me and I sang Brian's parts and played the bass so it worked out for Brian beautifully.

We were doing Midwest ballrooms in the United States, beautiful. At the time it was called dance music, there was this transition from the big band to rock'n'roll and all those guys were playing the same ballrooms so we found ourselves playing after Buddy Holly was there, the Big Bopper and all those guys – Johnny Cash was playing the same places. It was charming to actually have people dancing on the floor while you were playing your music.

BRIAN QUITTING TOURING [*at the end of 1964*] was really unexpected. He had a breakdown, an emotional trauma, he couldn't help himself. It was a challenge to play the more complex songs he started writing, although right after we recorded "Good Vibrations", which wasn't on *Pet Sounds* but should've been, the band went out and played Michigan State University and we sounded pretty good. We were going to make it work and after that, learning to do Brian's parts, it wasn't that hard. We over-compensated and began to take over producing things and writing songs ourselves, as a band so that we were able to continue to have output even though Brian wasn't a hundred per cent at some juncture. We were always better with Brian, but we had to continue to write and arrange music because we had recording contracts to fulfil.

If the world struggled to catch up with The Beach Boys after *Pet Sounds*, we were trying to catch up with them too. We were always playing catch-up, it seems. I don't know why but we never seemed to be in sync with current events. Either we were ahead or behind, I'm not sure, but we never really captured the moment. I felt we were out-of-step with the late-'60s but we're not rockers, we're singers.

The revival after 1974's *Endless Summer* album was like a godsend. We were at our ebb, we had ebbed, it was like, 'Man, I don't know how much more we have to do to prove ourselves and stay valid', and somehow it felt like we were validated. It was a wonderful feeling, we were very fortunate. After the 2012 reunion I was rather hoping to have another one. We need to do it one more time for the world!

**"THE SCREAMING STARTED AND BRIAN BECAME OVERWHELMED BY IT"**
AL JARDINE

**An expanded edition of *Sounds Of Summer: The Very Best Of The Beach Boys* is out June 17**

The Beach Boys in 1964: (l-r) Dennis Wilson, Mike Love, Brian Wilson (top), Al Jardine and Carl Wilson

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

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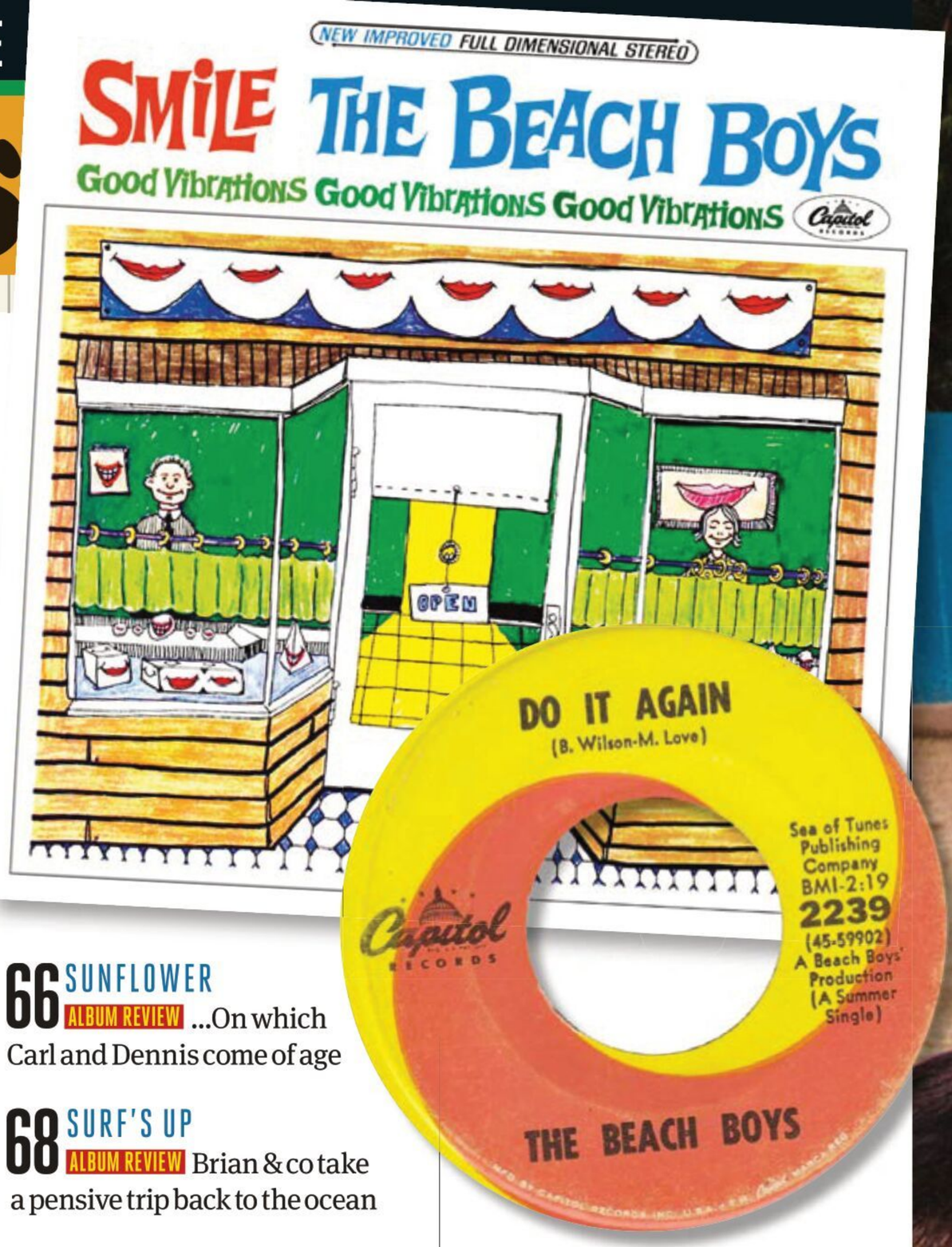


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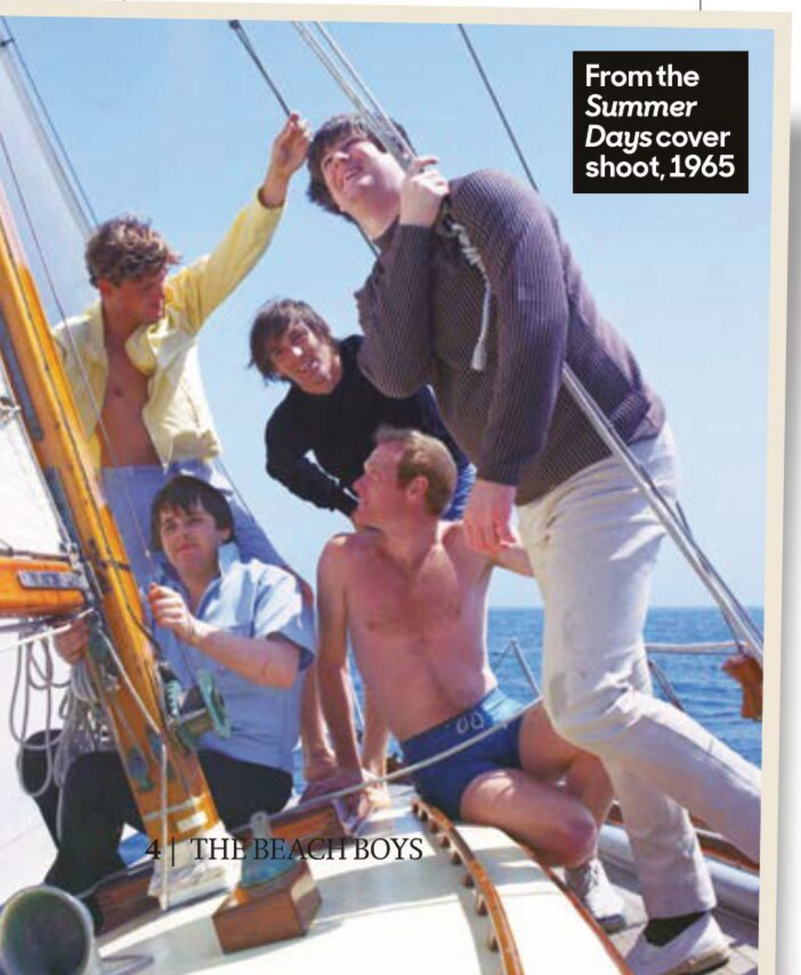
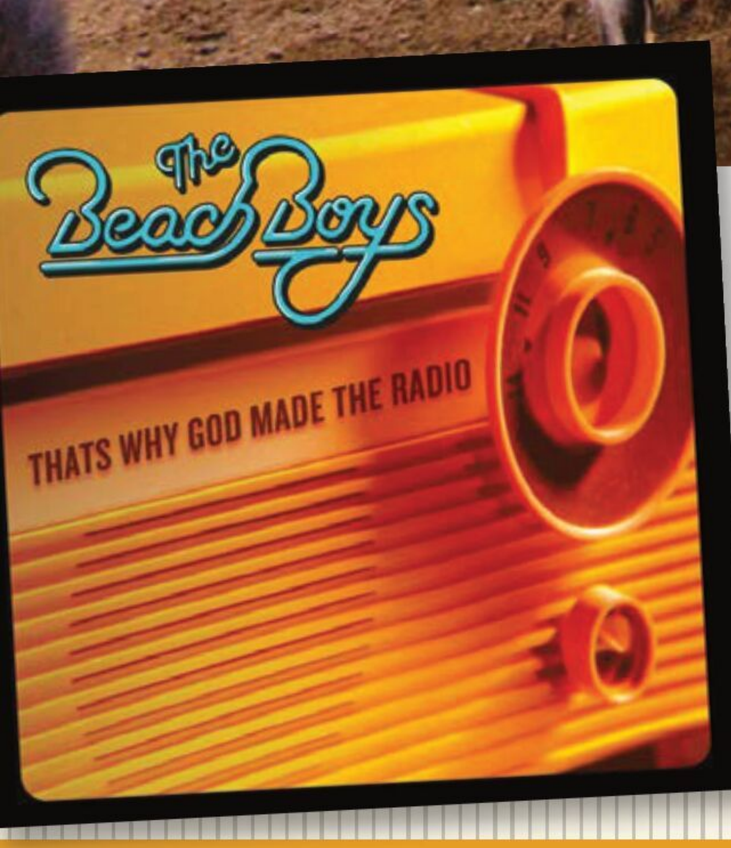

From the *Summer Days* cover shoot, 1965

From the cover shoot for *Pet Sounds*, San Diego Zoo, February 15, 1966





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THE BEACH BOYS ALBUMS

RELEASED: OCTOBER 1, 1962 | MARCH 25, 1963

# SURFIN' SAFARI / SURFIN' USA

**On the crest of a new craze, LA's youthful Pendletones take a dip into the music business. Let's go trippin'!** BY NEIL SPENCER

**Critics' Verdict**

"It's that surfing sound again and, if you don't find that falsetto lead is getting a bit wearing, then you will enjoy this typical Beach Boys album. There are instrumentals to vary the sound, and the material includes highlights 'Stoked', 'Lana', 'Surf Jam' and 'Finders Keepers'."

MELODY MAKER ON *SURFIN' USA*, SEPTEMBER 11, 1965

IT WAS MEANT to be a moment of communal triumph for the Wilson clan; unpacking a box of singles – their first – from their label, Candix. There it was, "SURFIN", in silver capitals, except that below was not their chosen name, The Pendletones, but 'BEACH BOYS'.

Though the group were dumbfounded, the marketing men at their tiny LA label had done them a fat favour with a name change that, unlike the ponderous Pendletones (named after a shaggy check overshirt favoured by surfers), rolled off the tongue and placed the group precisely where they wanted to be – on the beach, catching the wave.

Not in real life, of course. Dennis aside, the Wilson clan didn't actually surf, but they knew what was cool, what was neat, and alongside custom cars, Bass Weejun loafers, Ford T-Birds, dance crazes (Mike Love was a keen Frugger), Pendleton shirts and bushy-bushy blond hair-dos, surfing was neat. "Surfin'" was its first anthem.

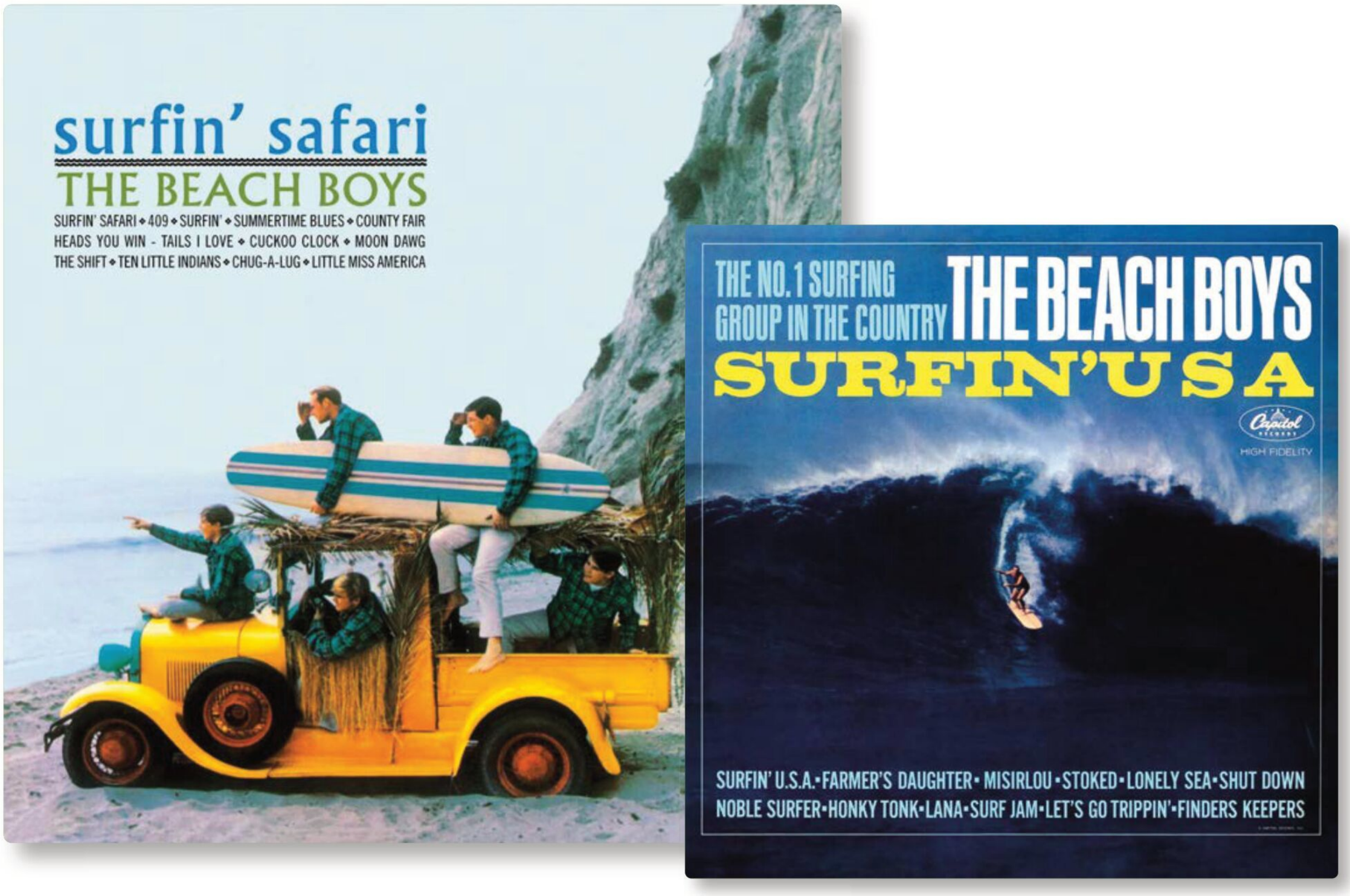
Pop was a late-comer to a subculture that had entered American teen life back in 1957 via *Gidget*, a coming of-age best-seller set in Malibu Beach, its eponymous hero modelled on the daughter of author Frederick Kohner, a Hollywood scriptwriter. Though both book and Hollywood's 1959 version, starring Sandra Dee, centred on young romance, *Gidget* also evoked the freewheeling lifestyle of Malibu surf bums and their hipster argot (Gidget was short for Girl Midget).

Promoted as a wholesome, boy-and-girl-next-door affair, full of hot young bodies, romance and freedom amid California's endless summer, surfing became an escapist national craze – Elvis' *Blue Hawaii* arrived in the same month as The Beach Boys' debut single. Oddly, surfing came with no distinctive soundtrack beyond a few post-Twist dance crazes and Hawaiian songs. What real surf-bums liked was guitar instrumentals by The Ventures and Duane Eddy, with the 'surf sound' codified by the cavernous twang of "Let's Go Tripping" (1961) and "Misirlou" (1962) by LA's Dick Dale, a committed surfer. The boom of Pacific billows became a Fender Stratocaster fed through a cathedral of reverb, echo and tremolo.

With The Beach Boys, surfing found a voice, or rather a medley of voices imbued with the magic of sibling harmony. A big hit in Southern California, "Surfin'" reached 75 on the national chart, no mean feat for a record that was essentially retro doo-wop, with Mike Love voicing a goofy *dip-da-da-diddly-dit* chant, though the track also borrowed a guitar riff from "Underwater" by Candix labelmates The Frogmen. Nonetheless it took a fully formed demo of "Surfin' Safari" (produced by Brian in a weekend) to win the group a contract with Capitol, who were rewarded with a national hit. "Safari" was a slight piece of chugging rock'n'roll, but with a catchy chorus, surfer slang (*"shooting the pier"*, *"woodies"*) and an inclusive call to adventure. Further, it showcased vocals that had their origin in the Wilson brothers' bedroom and Brian's obsession with the barbershop harmonies of The Four Freshmen. Plus its B-side, "409", a paean to a Chevrolet engine, became the first hot-rod record. Neat.

The hastily assembled album that followed was memorable principally for a cover shot that showed the band in their Pendletons posing on Malibu's Paradise Beach, surf board at the ready. Singles aside, the music was unexceptional, a mix of frat-house standards like "Summertime Blues' and frugalongs like "Chug a Lug". A cover of Herb Albert's "Miss America" (Dennis' first lead) reinforced a sense of harmless high-school fun. Dangerous the Beach Boys were not.

Nor was much else in pop. By 1962, it seemed that conservative America had finally succeeded in taming the rock'n'roll insurrection. Elvis was comatose in Hollywood. Holly and Cochran dead, Little Richard in denial, Jerry Lee




Lewis in disgrace and Chuck Berry in jail. The Beach Boys were part of an anodyne, all-white wasteland of Bobby's and Bobby's girls, drippy ballads and lame dance crazes, a package gushed out in endless beach party movies, though George Lucas' nostalgic *American Graffiti* (1973) captures the delights of teenage California at play.

"Surfin' USA" rocketed The Beach Boys up the national charts (No 2) and established them as the standard-bearers of surfdom. One can only imagine the reaction of Chuck Berry, then languishing in jail, to the appropriation of "Sweet Little Sixteen" for the Boys' hymn to board-riding. Though legal parity was later established, the blatant lift struck a sour note amid the success now engulfing the band.

THE ALBUM THAT followed sealed the deal. Brian Wilson was a fast learner, and though Nick Venet again took the producer's credit, *Surfin' USA* has Brian's fingerprints all over it. Fronted by a dramatic shot of a lone Hawaiian surfer, the album effectively draw together surf music's two strands, the Boys' distinctive vocals alternating with rugged instrumental work-outs of Dale's two hits and Bill Doggett's "Honky Tonk" with homegrown shots like "Stoked". Hot-rodding got a nod, too, on "Shut Down", a Top 30 single.

On one level, *Surfin' USA* was just another cash-in album built on a hit or two, yet it was cohesive and fun. It showed that The Beach Boys were more than a family choir, they were a self-contained band, they could (just about) rock. Looking back in 1990, Brian recalled: "We had gotten into a fast pace, almost athletic in nature." *Surfin' USA* flew by.

The original songs were largely formulaic – a rhythm section and bass vocals borrowed from the '50s R'n'B records Brian had grown up with, overlaid by barbershop vocals derived from his fascination with The Four Freshmen, The Hi-Lo's and The Four Preps (who, interestingly, had featured in the *Gidget* movie). In that sense, The Beach Boys represented a continuum of American musical tradition.

> WHO KNEW SURFERS WERE CAPABLE OF SUCH ARTISTRY?

The influence of vocal chamber pop was much in play on the track that remains the centrepiece of *Surfin' USA*, "Lonely Sea", a slow lachrymose ballad whose gentle sway reflects its oceanic inspiration. Who knew surfers were capable of such reflection and artistry? Not a music industry that expected the surf craze to have the life expectancy of The Watusi and The Twist; that it didn't was down largely to The Beach Boys.

## Trackmarks SURFIN' SAFARI/SURFIN' USA

**Surfin' Safari**

1. Surfin ' Safari ★★★★
2. County Fair ★★
3. Ten Little Indians ★★★
4. Chug-A-Lug ★★
5. Little Girl (You're My Miss America) ★★★
6. 409 ★★★★
7. Surfin' ★★★★
8. Heads You Win – Tails I Lose ★ ★
9. Summertime Blues ★★
10. Cuckoo Clock ★★
11. Moon Dawg ★★
12. The Shift ★★

**Label:** Capitol Records
**Producers:** Nick Venet/ Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** October 1961 to September 1962 at Capitol Studios and Hite Morgan Studios, CA
**Personnel:** Mike Love (vocals), Al Jardine (vocals), David Marks (vocals, guitar), Brian Wilson (vocals, bass, keyboards), Carl Wilson (vocals, guitar), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums), Nick Vent (guitar)
**Highest chart position:** UK – , US 32

**Surfin' USA**

1. Surfin' USA ★★★
2. Farmer's Daughter ★★
3. Miserlou ★★★
4. Stoked ★★★
5. Lonely Sea ★★★★★
6. Shut Down ★★★★
7. Noble Surfer ★★★★
8. Honky Tonk ★★
9. Lana ★★★
10. Surf Jam ★★★
11. Let's Go Trippin' ★★
12. Finders Keepers ★★★

**Label:** Capitol Records
**Producers:** Nick Venet/ Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** June 1962 to February 1963 at Capitol Studios and United Western Recorders, Hollywood
**Personnel:** Mike Love (vocals), Al Jardine (vocals), David Marks (vocals, guitar), Brian Wilson (vocals, bass, keys). Carl Wilson vocals, guitar), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums)
**Highest chart position:** UK 17, US 2

RELEASED: SEPTEMBER 16, 1963 | OCTOBER 7, 1963

# SURFER GIRL/ LITTLE DEUCE COUPE

**Brian becomes producer and, with the aid of a host of co-writers and the Wrecking Crew, supercharges the Beach Boys sound.** ***BY LOUIS PATTISON***

## Critics' Verdict

**"A new hot-rod album from The Beach Boys – who are gaining popularity over here all the time. Two of their biggest US hits, the title track and 'Shut Down', are included, as well as the slow, sad 'Ballad Of Ole' Betsy', and the repetitive, but mechanically technical 'Cherry, Cherry, Coupe'. Fine Beach Boys stuff, with the falsetto and bass harmonies, the indefinite recordings and the jogging beats."**

MELODY MAKER ON *LITTLE DEUCE COUPE*, DECEMBER 4, 1965

AS "SURFIN' USA" streaked up the *Billboard* chart in March 1963 and enthusiasm for this ambrosia-voiced young group rippled across the country, The Beach Boys set out on a tour of the mid-West. For Brian Wilson, though, playing live had already lost its allure – in part because of the Wilson family's fearsome patriarch, Murry, who insisted on tour managing his young charges with all the relaxed manner of a military drill, and partly because, for Brian, it was increasingly the studio, not the road, that offered the real promise of adventure. At Brian's invitation, founder member Al Jardine returned from studying towards a pharmacy degree in Grand Rapids, Michigan to rejoin the group. But the idea, in Brian's mind at least, wasn't that Jardine would bolster the band's sound. With his guitar skills and clear, high tones, Jardine was to be the Beach Boys leader's touring replacement – and with that, Brian returned to Hawthorne, and his real loves: songwriting and recording.

Some of the groundwork for Brian Wilson's first full-album production job had been laid in the years before. The title track, for instance, is the first song the young Brian ever wrote, aged just 19 – mapped out in his head, if you believe it, while he drove to a hot dog stand. Inspired by his first girlfriend, Judy Bowles, and Leigh Harline and Ned Washington's wistful crooner for Disney's *Pinocchio*, "When You Wish Upon A Star", it's a neat trifecta of the group's three main concerns – surfing, cars and girls – delivered ballad style, with long, honey-drizzled harmonies.

Even if his decision to quit touring hadn't been a matter of psychic necessity for the young Beach Boy, it would prove serendipitous. The next 12 months would constitute a gigantic leap in Brian's songwriting capabilities and studio craft, as he threw himself into all manner of experiments and collaborations. "Brian was writing songs with people he found on the road in front of his house, DJs, anyone," recalled guitarist David Marks in Peter Ames Carlin's Beach Boys biography *Catch A Wave*. "He had so much stuff flowing through him at once, he couldn't handle it."

One such collaborator was LA disc jockey Roger Christian, a car enthusiast some 20 years Brian's senior who Murry Wilson brought into the fold. He and Brian went out for fudge sundaes in Hollywood, batted around some of the freshest hot-rodder slang, and the result was "Little Deuce Coupe" – a hip rock'n'roller named after the vintage Ford model beloved of street racers. Another was Gary Usher, a 20-year-old songwriter, in Hawthorne to visit his grandparents, who heard music issuing from The Beach Boys' studio, and dropped in to introduce himself. For *Surfer Girl*, the pair penned the gorgeous "In My Room", a hymn to solitude and the transformative power of music that spoke of a deep inner life away from waxed surfboards and purring engines.

The album also marks the first instance of Brian employing non-Beach Boys to bring his musical ideas to fruition. Hal Blaine, one of LA's most in-demand session musicians and central cog of The Wrecking Crew could often be found manning the drum kit while Dennis hit the beach. Mere months before, Blaine had drummed on The Ronettes song "Be My Baby", and Brian had listened to the Phil Spector production over and over, on loop. "It wasn't like having your mind blown, it was like having your mind revamped," he told *The New York Times* in 2013. "It's like, once you've heard that record, you're a fan forever."

There is further evidence here of Brian's blossoming compositional ambitions. "The Surfer Moon" is the first Beach Boys track to boast a string arrangement, its lazy doo-wop dotted with pizzicato melodies. The Mike Love-sung "Catch A Wave", meanwhile, is a giddy co-write that's straight down the line lyrically – it begins *"Don't be afraid to try the greatest sport around..."*, and you can fill the rest in from there – but is transported somewhere more fantastical thanks to strummed harp from Love's sister, Maureen. Still, as is the case with Beach Boys albums of this period, some

material feels thin: see "Hawaii", with its hokey lyrics about girls in grass skirts; the makeweight "Surfer's Rule"; or a perfunctory run through the traditional "Boogie Woodie".

Perhaps it was time for a new direction. Capitol certainly thought so, or perhaps more accurately were eager to get another Beach Boys album on the shelves before the fickle public moved elsewhere. So the group's third album of 1963 was *Little Deuce Coupe*, a car-themed collection which repeated two songs from *Surfer Girl* – the title track and cocksure fraternity number "Our Car Club" – as well as "Shut Down" from *Surfin' USA* and "409", the original hot-rod anthem from the group's debut.

What could come off as a straightforward cash-in is saved by a smattering of originals. "Ballad Of Ole' Betsy" is a tearjerker about a girlfriend from Detroit City, whose loyalty and beauty can't be matched... except the final reveal lets it slip this old girl is not in fact a girl, but a car: *"She may be rusted iron, but to me she's solid gold..."* This could come over jokey or sentimental, but Brian fills it to the brim with emotion. And it's hard to listen to the line *"Betsy took some beatings but she never once complained,"* without thinking of the young man's relationship with his belligerent, bullying father.

Following on its tail is "Be True To Your School", which borrows its melody from the University Of Wisconsin's fight song "On Wisconsin" and explodes it into Technicolor harmonies. Rock'n'roll has so commonly been enmeshed with rebellion that it is initially jarring to hear a song about pride in your community that sounds quite so preppy. But from the boys dressed in letterman sweaters to the girls shaking their pom-poms at the football game, it makes the high-school experience sound positively Elysian: a jock anthem transported to heaven.

**THESE TWO LPS FOUND THE BOYS SHIFTING INTO A NEW LANE**

WE'RE BACK BEHIND the wheel on "Spirit Of America", which sings the exploits of professional racing driver Craig Breedlove, who had driven the titular vehicle to a speed of 388mph that August to break a land speed record. Tribute of a sadder kind is paid on "A Young Man Is Gone". An a cappella harmony take on Bobby Troup's "Their Hearts Were Full of Spring" with revised lyrics by Mike Love, it pays tribute to James Dean, whose death in a car accident still reverberated through popular culture eight years on. It was a reminder of just how adept the Beach Boys were at turning familiar material to their own ends. But *Surfer Girl* and *Little Deuce Coupe* also found The Beach Boys shifting into a new lane, one in which original songs and studio experimentation would play an increasing role. Soon it would be time to leave the beach. But not *quite* yet.

## Trackmarks SURFER GIRL/LITTLE DEUCE COUPE

### Surfer Girl

1. Surfer Girl ★★★★
2. Catch A Wave ★★★★★
3. The Surfer Moon ★★★
4. South Bay Surfer (The Old Folks At Home) ★★★
5. The Rocking Surfer ★★
6. Little Deuce Coupe ★★★
7. In My Room ★★★★★
8. Hawaii ★★★
9. Surfer's Rule ★★★
10. Our Car Club ★★★
11. Your Summer Dream ★★★
12. Boogie Woodie ★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Producer:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** United Western Recorders, Hollywood
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (lead, backing and harmony vocals, bass guitar, piano, organ), Al Jardine (backing and harmony vocals, bass guitar, hand claps), Mike Love (lead, backing and harmony vocals), David Marks (rhythm guitar), Carl Wilson (backing and harmony vocals, lead guitar, bass guitar), Dennis Wilson (lead, backing and harmony vocals, drums), Hal Blaine (drums, percussion), Steve Douglas (tenor sax), Maureen Love (harp)
**Highest chart position:** UK 3, US 7

### Little Deuce Coupe

1. Little Deuce Coupe ★★★
2. Ballad Of Ole' Betsy ★★★★
3. Be True To Your School ★★★
4. Car Crazy Cutie ★★
5. Cherry, Cherry Coupe ★★★
6. 409 ★★★★
7. Shut Down ★★★★
8. Spirit Of America ★★★
9. Our Car Club ★★★
10. No-Go Showboat ★★
11. A Young Man Is Gone ★★★
12. Custom Machine ★★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Produced:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** April 19, 1962 to September 2, 1963 United Western Recorders, Hollywood
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (lead, harmony and backing vocals, bass guitar), Al Jardine (harmony and backing vocals, bass guitar), Mike Love (lead, harmony and backing vocals, saxophone), David Marks (harmony and backing vocals, rhythm guitar), Carl Wilson (harmony and backing vocals, lead guitar), Dennis Wilson (harmony and backing vocals, drums)
**Highest chart position:** UK –, US 4

RELEASED: MARCH 2, 1964 | JULY 13, 1964

# SHUT DOWN VOL 2/ ALL SUMMER LONG

**Fun, fun, fun? The rapid cash-in albums evolve into something more substantial.** ***BY NIGEL WILLIAMSON***

## Critics' Verdict

"This Californian quintet put a lot of vocal vitality into its dozen swinging beaters, with plenty of instrumental novelty creeping in."

ALLEN EVANS ON *ALL SUMMER LONG*, NME, JULY 14, 1965

ALTHOUGH THE BEACH BOYS in their early iteration were a dedicated singles act, that didn't stop their record company flooding the market with albums. Released in March 1964, *Shut Down Volume 2* was The Beach Boys' fifth LP in 18 months. Before the year turned, they would release three more, including a live recording and a Christmas album. It meant that by the end of 1964, the group had actually released more albums (eight) than it had had Top 10 US singles (seven).

For the most part they were hastily assembled affairs, sold on the back of a hit single and padded out with instrumentals, covers and spoken-word interludes. Few in pop music had yet worked out that the LP could be a brilliantly creative medium for pushing boundaries and exploring new horizons. The musical arms race in which The Beatles, The Beach Boys, Dylan and The Byrds would use their albums to push each other to fresh heights of invention was still a way off.

In the meantime, the average pop LP in 1964 was an exploitative concept. Unless you were Dylan (who, as a folk singer, didn't count), the best songs went on Side One. What was left or could be scraped off the studio floor was thrown at Side Two, as if middle-aged record company executives doubted that a teenage audience possessed the attention span to turn over a long-playing platter and listen to 30 minutes of continuous music.

*Shut Down Volume 2* was characteristic. The title came from a song about drag racing that had appeared on The Beach Boys' second album and, with a ham-fisted laziness typical of the time, again on the group's fourth album. Capitol then used "Shut Down" a third time as the title track of a multi-artist album of hot-rodding songs – and when that collection made No 7 on the *Billboard* chart, a second volume consisting solely of Beach Boys songs about cars seemed like a winner. But Brian Wilson had filled the group's previous album, *Little Deuce Coupe*, with hot-rod hymns and was close to having exhausted the subject. As a result, the 'concept' was half-baked – only a handful of the songs on *Shut Down Volume 2* actually referenced the ostensible subject matter, and one of those was a Carl Wilson instrumental.

The album accelerates off the starting grid with the majestic hit single, "Fun, Fun, Fun", a classic Beach Boys hybrid of Chuck Berry and Phil Spector translated into Californian myth, with a lyric allegedly inspired by a T-Bird-driving teenage girl whom Dennis Wilson was dating. The more pensive "Don't Worry Baby" is another surefire classic, intended by Wilson as his riposte to Spector's "Be My Baby". The hot-rodding theme has the feeling of being rather desperately bolted on ("*When you race today, just take along my love with you*"); but it's a stellar performance and deserved to have been an A-side rather than merely the flip of "I Get Around".

There's one further gem in "Warmth Of The Sun", a lush ballad with some thrillingly audacious chord progressions, written the day Kennedy was assassinated. But after that it's considerably more miss than hit. "In The Parking Lot" is an inferior demo for "Help Me Rhonda". "This Car Of Mine" is notable only as a rare early example of a Dennis Wilson lead vocal.

On Side Two, the spark plugs start misfiring badly, prior to the engine shuddering to a halt. A cover of "Why Do Fools Fall In Love", which made the B-side of "Fun, Fun, Fun", adds a Spector-inspired backbeat to Frankie Lymon's doo-wop hit. "Pom Pom Play Girl" exchanges the race track for a football field and must surely have seemed vaguely embarrassing, even at the time. "Keep An Eye On Summer" is lovely enough in its ephemeral slightness before a cover of "Louie Louie" and Dennis' gratuitous percussion solo "Denny's Drums" indicate the tank is out of gas.

In retrospect, a combination of the car songs on *Little*

*Deuce Coupe* and *Shut Down Volume 2* could have made a classic hot-rodding album. Instead, *Shut Down Volume 2* failed to repeat the success of the compilation which had 'inspired' it and the album didn't even make the Top 10 of the *Billboard* chart.

RELEASED JUST FOUR months later, *All Summer Long* was a dramatic improvement, perhaps because the hot-rods and surf boards were staring to be dismissed as outmoded teen fashion accessories; as Brian Wilson told *Melody Maker* at the time, "Surfing is now strictly passé ...and hot-rods have reached their peak."

Instead he created an ode to the Californian sunshine. The album opens thrillingly with "I Get Around", which not only gave The Beach Boys their first American No 1, but represented a liberation in another sense: during the song's recording Brian became so exasperated with his dictatorial and conservative father, Murry, that he slammed him up against a wall and fired him as the group's manager.

"Hushabye", a cover of the 1959 doo-wop hit by The Mystics and loosely based on the lullaby "All The Pretty Horses", is a perfect showcase for the group's celestial harmonies and feels like a prototype for "Our Prayer". "Little Honda" takes one last nostalgic ride from the hot-rod era. "We'll Run Away" is teen romance at its most dreamily romantic and "Wendy" a hymn to its break-up, with jaw-droppingly adventurous harmonic modulations (all down to plagal cadence and tritone substitution, apparently). "Do You Remember", an exuberant tribute to *"the guys who gave us rock'n'roll"*, namechecks Little Richard, Chuck, Elvis, Jerry Lee and Dick Clark's *Bandstand*. "Girls On The Beach" is an old-school surf ballad *sans* the surf boards, as the guys prefer to *"lie around"* in the dunes, the better to get up close and personal to all that sun-tanned female flesh. The album closes with "Don't Back Down", classic Beach Boys harmonies set against a glorious falsetto that channels Frankie Valli, whose "Rag Doll" with the Four Seasons would displace "I Get Around" at No 1 the week after *All Summer Long*'s release.

> *ALL SUMMER LONG* IS ARGUABLY THE PERFECT EARLY BEACH BOYS ALBUM

Although only 25 minutes long, after *Shut Down Volume 2*'s under-achievement, *All Summer Long* is arguably the perfect early Beach Boys album, brimming with just enough musical sophistication and emotional duality to be seen as a significant way-marker on the road from gleefully innocent surf-pop to the full-blown genius of *Pet Sounds*.

## Trackmarks SHUT DOWN VOL 2/ALL SUMMER LONG

**Shutdown Vol. 2**

1. Fun, Fun, Fun ★★★★★
2. Don't Worry Baby ★★★★★
3. In the Parkin' Lot ★★★
4. "Cassius" Love vs "Sonny" Wilson (spoken word) ★
5. The Warmth Of The Sun ★★★★★
6. This Car Of Mine ★★
7. Why Do Fools Fall In Love ★★★
8. Pom Pom Play Girl ★★
9. Keep An Eye On Summer ★★★★
10. Shut Down, Part II (instrumental) ★★
11. Louie, Louie ★★★
12. Denny's Drums ★

**Label:** Capitol
**Produced:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** January 1 – February 20, 1964 at United Western Recorders & Gold Star Studios, Hollywood
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (vocals, piano), Mike Love (vocals), Carl Wilson (vocals, guitars), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums), Al Jardine (vocals, bass guitar)
**Highest chart position:** UK – , US 13

**All Summer Long**

1. I Get Around ★★★★★
2. All Summer Long ★★★★★
3. Hushabye ★★★★
4. Little Honda ★★★
5. We'll Run Away ★★★★
6. Carl's Big Chance (instrumental) ★★
7. Wendy ★★★★★
8. Do You Remember? ★★★★
9. Girls On The Beach ★★★★
10. Drive-In ★★
11. Our Favourite Recording Sessions (spoken word) ★
12. Don't Back Down ★★★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Produced:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** October 18, 1963 – May 19, 1964 at United Western Recorders, Hollywood
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (vocals, keyboards), Mike Love (vocals), Carl Wilson (vocals, guitars), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums), Al Jardine (vocals, bass guitar)
**Highest chart position:** UK 7, US 4

The Beach Boys in 1964: *(clwise from bottom left)* Al Jardine, Dennis Wilson, Brian Wilson, Carl Wilson and Mike Love

# "Trends keep moving. Surfing is now strictly passé..."

**AUGUST 1964.** Brian Wilson explains the Boys' masterplan to a new British audience. Surfing is over. Hot-rods have peaked. "The 'in' thing now," he reveals,"is motor scooters!"

**MELODY MAKER** AUGUST 22, 1964

Melody Maker 32
BEATLES GET TICKER TAPE WELCOME!

SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD Dennis Wilson, a Los Angeles high-schooler, came home from school one afternoon to query his older brother, Brian: "Why don't you write a song about surfing? All the guys at school are doing it these days and they think the sport ought to have its own song. How about it, Brian?"

That all happened in September 1961. The Brian in the story is Brian Wilson, lanky, long-haired leader of The Beach Boys, perhaps one of the two hottest American groups in the pop record business. The fellow who asked the question is also a member of the group, as is his other brother, Carl, along with Mike Love and Al Jardine.

"That really is just about how it happened," Brian told me on the long distance phone from Reno, Nevada, last week. "I was kind of a nut about trying to write songs and get into the music business and I took a try at the surf idea. I figured with all the kids so hip to the sport maybe we could get an identification. We cut a record at our own expense and got a label to put it out. It sold pretty well, but the experience proved the value of getting with a good label.

"There were five of us on the record, my two younger brothers, a couple of friends and me. Carl, who was 14, played guitar. He was the only one who could play anything. The rest of us just sang. Finally, my father took a new master we cut to Capitol Records in Hollywood, except it took a long time to find the right man, about five weeks or so. But finally, we got signed."

In fact, according to Capitol A&R Vice President Voyle Gilmore, looking back on that period in early 1962, "I told Nick Venet [*a former Capitol producer*] not to let the man get out of the office. I felt we should get the group fast. And we did. Their first record for us was 'Surfin' Safari' and it was a smash. Now they've got their first million-seller. 'I Get Around' has hit that mark and their first five albums have sold more than a million all told."

WILSON CLAIMS CREDIT for getting the surf-identified music off the ground. "With us, it wasn't a conscious thing to deliberately build a music around surfing," Wilson continued, "It was just a lucky guess on my part to write lyrics that surfers would understand, to music they would like and dance to. We just want to be identified with the interests of young kids. That's why we also got into the hot-rod scene. You know how kids love to talk about cars. What's more natural than to give them music to go with it?"

"But the trends keep moving. Surfing is now strictly passé as far as the music goes. And hot-rods have reached their peak. The really 'in' thing now is motor scooters. I'm the one who does most of the writing and arranging and I spend a great deal of time in the office on the Strip in Hollywood figuring out song ideas that will make The Beach Boys bigger and bigger.

"We're not staying with any specific fad now, just trying to stay on the kids' wavelength with their interests. Our new single, for instance, will be 'When I Grow Up'. But first and foremost, I want us to be a good vocal group. That's what I'm working on.

"But getting back to our style. Call it West Coast or whatever you want. I'll say that I have personally been influenced very heavily by The Four Freshmen and when you think you hear a little of their sound in our singing, it's no accident.

"Dick Reynolds, the arranger for the Freshmen, is just about a god to me. His work is the greatest and the Freshmen's execution is too much. It's their good, basic, musical, harmony feeling that I've tried to get The Beach Boys with. I think we've succeeded too. I've also done some writing and arranging for other people, not too much because our group is more than a full-time job, but I wrote 'Surf City', 'Drag City' and 'New Girl In School' for Jan & Dean."

Since The Beach Boys are turning their faces eastward, to the East Coast of America and to England, it's probably in order for Brian Wilson to discuss The Beatles (he has an opinion of substance on practically anything in the music scene), and he lauds the Britishers for "their creative abilities and for glorifying the drums".

"Drums will be a lot more important from now on, because of what they've done in their arrangements. Also they've helped make groups extremely big, and partly by focusing public attention on the individual group member. This has never really happened before that I know of. They've been great for the whole business, they play their music well, even if it's somewhat synthetic and composed of earlier styles all worked in together."

Meanwhile, The Beach Boys go on influencing styles in their own right. An important group, and one that's getting bigger. *REN GREVATT*

**"IT WAS JUST A LUCKY GUESS TO WRITE LYRICS THAT SURFERS WOULD UNDERSTAND, TO MUSIC THEY'D DANCE TO"**
BRIAN WILSON

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: **NOVEMBER 9, 1964**

# THE BEACH BOYS' CHRISTMAS ALBUM

**Brian Wilson's path to the perfect album takes a strange seasonal detour. The man with all the toys? Not yet...**

***BY LAURA SNAPES***

THE BEACH BOYS first tried their hand at Christmas cheer with 1963's "Little Saint Nick", a festive reworking of that year's "Little Deuce Coupe". Brian Wilson was inspired to write a holiday song after Phil Spector invited him to play on his Christmas record that autumn – from which he was dropped, his talents apparently insufficient. As it happened, both Spector's album and The Beach Boys' single flopped due to the very recent assassination of President John F Kennedy, which dominated the news and shunted entertainment from the airwaves.

Undeterred, Wilson completed four more songs for The Beach Boys' first Christmas album, which they rounded out with seven classic carols and holiday hits, and recorded in June 1964. They split the album along those lines: the rockier originals on Side One, arranged and played by the band. "Frosty The Snowman" ended that disc, while the remaining old numbers were on Side Two – all played by a 41-piece orchestra arranged by Dick Reynolds, who Brian deified for his work with the outdated 1950s vocal group, The Four Freshmen. "He's just about a god to me," he said. "His work is the greatest, and The Freshmen's execution is too much."

The record came out a week after incumbent Lyndon B Johnson defeated Republican Barry Goldwater in the 1964 presidential election, bringing stability to the position he had occupied since Kennedy's death. The release was inadvertently well-timed: the perceived demand for The Beach Boys to make a cash-in Christmas record echoed the renewed commercial prosperity in the United States, and topped off the band's unbelievable success: including *Beach Boys Concert*, it was their eighth album in three years. Though, as Mike Love told it, it was also a true reflection of their family Christmas carolling get-togethers.

*The Beach Boys' Christmas Album* isn't particularly acclaimed. Whether listening in stereo or coveted mono, there's a hyper-saturated quality to the recordings that borders on derangement. It's jarring now, although hysterical jollity was doubtless symptomatic of the era, and sunny California's overcompensation for its lack of traditional snowy Christmas cheer. It's a cynical 21st century tendency to find something sinister in innocent 1960s fare, though the aftermath of this album makes it hard to avoid. (That, and one bootleg where Brian can be heard describing Christmas Day as "a fucking piece of shit".) On the final song, "Auld Lang Syne", Dennis Wilson bids farewell atop his bandmates' harmonies, stumbling as he wishes listeners *"as much happiness as this year has brought us"*. He's not wishing their fans ill will, but you wonder how much happiness the year truly brought the band. The fact that perfectionist Brian leaves in Dennis' stumble is curious, too.

Their schedule for 1963/'64 was absolutely punishing, with commitments almost every day. After a few TV appearances (sandwiching a recording session for 1965's *Today!*) in mid-December, their Christmas tour kicked off on December 19 (or 23? according to conflicting reports) at Tulsa's Assembly Center Arena. After the show, they took a plane to Houston, and Brian had a massive breakdown. Earlier that month he had married his first wife, The Honeys' Marilyn Rutherford, but they weren't getting along. He'd also recently started smoking weed. "The plane had been in the air only five minutes when I told Al Jardine I was going to crack up any minute," he told *Teen Magazine*'s Earl Leaf. He freaked out, sobbing and yelling on the floor, but eventually played the Houston show. "Next morning, I woke up with the biggest knot in my stomach and I felt like I was going out of my mind," he said. "In other words, it was a breakdown

period." He spent the day crying, and shut out his bandmates. Eventually, the road manager took him back to LA. He wouldn't appear live with the band for another 12 years.

Although insignificant in catalogue terms, *The Beach Boys' Christmas Album* marks a crucial transition for the group. In April '64, they had ditched Murry Wilson as their manager. That July, *All Summer Long* would be the last time they sang so concentratedly about California culture for years. After Brian retired from touring, he dedicated himself to his studio craft (and, increasingly, powerful drugs). It's the end of The Beach Boys' fantasy period, and transition into their artistic album age, a heightening of ambitions that may also have been triggered by the British Invasion that summer.

> THIS ALBUM MARKS A CRUCIAL TRANSITION FOR THE BEACH BOYS

NOT THAT THE record is devoid of charm. Even though the sleigh bells have been stripped from the single version of "Little Saint Nick", its chipper *"run, run reindeer!"* harmonies are synonymous with Christmas, and the powerful backing harmonies are intoxicating. The same is true of "The Man With All The Toys", which has a depth of harmony so intense it almost curdles. There are few traditional Christmas signifiers here, although the outro of "Santa's Beard" faintly echoes the rhythm of "Jingle Bells"."Merry Christmas, Baby" is an unconvincing plea for a lover to return, but it's offset by the final original number, "Christmas Day", which swaps hysteria for an affecting, melancholic doo-wop depth and one of the album's rare memorable melodies, sung by Al Jardine – his first lead vocal on a Beach Boys record.

The transition to the Dick Reynolds numbers feels like the opening of an opulent new chapter: all gambolling, simpering Old Hollywood glitz. A streak of stardust dazzles the superb staggered harmonies of "We Three Kings", yet Brian's delivery can't quite compare to his grandiose surroundings on "Blue Christmas". "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town" has a madcap cartoon intensity, while the lovely deep harmonies on "We Three Kings Of Orient Are" and "White Christmas" glide like a leisurely skate around a frozen pond, and the easy, lush stroll of "I'll Be Home For Christmas" presages their work with Van Dyke Parks.

*The Beach Boys' Christmas Album* ultimately fails on its promise, as Jardine sings, that they'd *"never outgrow the thrill of Christmas day"* – a 1977 attempt to write a second holiday record was so unconvincing, Warner Brothers turned it down.

## Trackmarks THE BEACH BOYS' CHRISTMAS ALBUM

1. Little Saint Nick ★★★★
2. The Man With All The Toys ★★★
3. Santa's Beard ★★
4. Merry Christmas, Baby ★★
5. Christmas Day ★★★★
6. Frosty The Snowman ★★★
7. We Three Kings Of Orient Are ★★★
8. Blue Christmas ★★★
9. Santa Claus Is Comin' To Town ★★★
10. White Christmas ★★★
11. I'll Be Home For Christmas ★★★
12. Auld Lang Syne ★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Producer:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** October 20, 1963 – June 30, 1964 at Capitol Studios and United Western Recorders, Hollywood
**Personnel:** Al Jardine (lead, harmony and backing vocals, electric rhythm guitar, handclaps), Mike Love (lead, harmony and backing vocals, handclaps), Brian Wilson (lead, harmony and backing vocals, bass, organ, handclaps), Carl Wilson (harmony and backing vocals, electric lead guitar, handclaps), Dennis Wilson (harmony, backing and spoken word vocals, drums, handclaps), Dick Reynolds (arrangements), 41-piece orchestra conducted by Benjamin Barrett
**Highest chart position:** UK –, US 6

RELEASED: MARCH 8, 1965

# TODAY!

**Please let me wonder... Away from the road and high on pot, Brian crafts his first masterpiece.** BY ROB HUGHES

## Critics' Verdict

"Another vigorous beat set from the Californian vocal-instrumental team, now constant single chart makers here... They rock out, rather joyously, with 'Help Me, Ronda'..."

ALLEN EVANS, NME, MAY 13, 1966

BRIAN WILSON HAD started to unravel by the end of 1964. The exacting demands of creating hit records for The Beach Boys aside, he'd also been writing and producing for a number of other artists, including Sharon Marie, The Survivors and all-girl group The Honeys. There was also the messy business with his father, Murry, who he'd sacked as The Beach Boys' manager earlier in the year. The residual ill-feeling between Wilson Sr and his eldest son, a mutually destructive relationship at the best of times, only compounded Brian's confusion. And now Capitol Records were pressuring him to deliver a new Beach Boys album (having already released four over the last 12 months alone) in the first quarter of 1965.

His tipping point came two days before Christmas, when an exhausted Wilson became hysterical during a flight to Houston, where the band were scheduled to perform. "I was run down mentally and emotionally," Wilson explained in Steve Gaines' biography, *Heroes And Villains: The True Story Of The Beach Boys*. "I was so mixed up and so overworked." The following month he told his bandmates that he'd retired from touring altogether.

Wilson's absolution from the rigours of the road gave him what he'd been craving most of all: time. There were other crucial factors, too, that played into the making of his next album, *The Beach Boys Today!* He'd already vowed to ditch the surf songs that had characterised the band's output thus far, a thematic recourse that had reached a conclusion of sorts on *All Summer Long*. But Wilson had also just discovered marijuana. Initially taken for anxiety relief, he now began using it as a means to uncover a deeper seam of creativity. As he put it himself: "Pot made the music grow in my head." The first tune that Wilson wrote on dope was "Please Let Me Wonder". Essentially a plea for the rest of The Beach Boys to allow him the freedom to pursue his own visions, it's a dream-like ballad with a melancholy touch, lifted by glowing harmonies and the semi-orchestral backing of sessioneers The Wrecking Crew. In a keening falsetto, Wilson displays the kind of vulnerability and candour that would later mark the lyrical thrust of *Pet Sounds*: *"Please forgive my shaking/Can't you tell my heart is breaking?/Can't make myself say what I planned to say."*

This new musical and emotional complexity is echoed in the equally striking "She Knows Me Too Well". Gone is the innocence of youthful infatuation, replaced instead by the realisation that romantic love is often an unsteady détente. Wilson sounds utterly conflicted on what feels like a darker precursor to, say, "You Still Believe In Me" or "That's Not Me". The song itself is beautifully decanted, with classic Beach Boy harmonies and an economical guitar solo from Carl Wilson.

Dennis takes the lead for "In The Back Of My Mind", another tune with a troubled undertow. Cushioned by a string section and a pillowy Wrecking Crew arrangement (that's Leon Russell on piano), it's slightly disconcerting to hear the grain of his sandy voice amid all the orchestral purity. *"I'm blessed with everything,"* he sings, in tones that foreshadow the fractured weariness of his own *Pacific Ocean Blue*, issued 12 years later. *"A world to which a man can cling/So happy times when I break out in tears/In the back of my mind I still have my fears."*

For all its introspection, though, *The Beach Boys Today!* is finely weighted between ballads and pop froth. Surfing and hot-rods may have been passé, but chasing girls certainly wasn't. An effervescent cover of Bobby Freeman's "Do You Wanna Dance?", with Dennis at the helm, boots Cliff Richard & The Shadows' version into the shade. Mike Love leads the vocal charge on the irrepressible "When I Grow Up (To Be A Man)", already a major US hit when released as a single in the late summer of '64. Equal parts Four Seasons and Four

Freshmen, it's a song that catches The Beach Boys between the shifting poles of adolescence and adulthood.

THE PARTY ATMOSPHERE of Side One is symbolised by "Dance, Dance, Dance", a buoyant invitation to shake it that heralds the first co-writing credit for Carl Wilson on a Beach Boys record. Perhaps the most ecstatic moment, though, is "Help Me, Ronda", a percussive masterclass wrapped in a fat wall of sound. Complete with thwacks of tambourine and Billy Lee Riley on harmonica, the album cut has a rawness that its re-recorded version lacks. Nevertheless, the latter (with an added 'h') would heighten the band's commercial clout when "Help Me Rhonda" knocked "Ticket To Ride" off the top of the *Billboard* singles chart in May 1965.

Quite why The Beach Boys elected to close the album with "Bull Session With The 'Big Daddy'" is anyone's guess. Just over two minutes of pointless studio natter with journalist Earl Leaf, the band are heard taking charge of burgers, cheese sandwiches and kosher pickles. And no-one laughs at Dennis Wilson's gag about meeting an A&R man called Dick Reising. Not that its inclusion made a jot of difference to how *The Beach Boys Today!* was received when it landed in March '65. Bolstered by four hit 45s, it went double-platinum in the States (hanging around the charts for nearly a year) and gave the group their first Top 10 album in the UK.

BOLSTERED BY FOUR HIT SINGLES, THIS ALBUM WENT DOUBLE-PLATINUM IN THE STATES

It can also be argued that *The Beach Boys Today!* was Brian Wilson's first truly cohesive statement, a transitional triumph that struck a near-perfect balance between catchy pop'n'roll and a newfound sense of sophistication.

He wasn't able to enjoy it all for long, however. Capitol, as was their wont, were already calling for fresh product.

## Trackmarks TODAY!

1. Do You Wanna Dance? ★★★
2. Good To My Baby ★★★★
3. Don't Hurt My Little Sister ★★★
4. When I Grow Up (To Be A Man) ★★★
5. Help Me, Ronda ★★★★
6. Dance, Dance, Dance ★★★★
7. Please Let Me Wonder ★★★
8. I'm So Young ★★★
9. Kiss Me, Baby ★★★
10. She Knows Me Too Well ★★★
11. In The Back Of My Mind ★★★★
12. Bull Session With The 'Big Daddy' ★

**Label:** Capitol
**Produced:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** June 22, 1964 to January 19, 1965 at United Western Recorders, Gold Star Studios and RCA Victor Studios, Hollywood
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (lead and harmony vocals, bass guitar, piano, harpsichord, organ), Al Jardine (harmony vocals, lead vocal on "Help Me, Ronda", rhythm guitar, bass), Mike Love (lead and harmony vocals), Carl Wilson (harmony vocals, lead and rhythm guitar, bass), Dennis Wilson (lead and harmony vocals, drums, tambourine), Chuck Britz (engineer), Hal Blaine (drums, woodblocks, sleigh bells, triangle, tambourine, castanets, temple block), Glen Campbell (guitar), Peter Christ (English horn), Steve Douglas (tenor saxophone), David Duke (French horn), John Gray (grand piano), Carl Fortina (accordion), Plas Johnson (tenor saxophone), Carol Kaye (bass guitar), Barney Kessel (classical nylon rhythm guitar, twelve-string guitar), Larry Knechtel – bass), Larry Levine (engineer), Carrol Lewis (double-reed harmonica), "Louie" (last name unknown) (castanets), Jack Nimitz (saxophone), Jay Migliori – baritone saxophone), Earl Palmer (drums, timbales), Don Randi (tack upright piano, organ), Bill Pitman (electric guitar, acoustic guitar), Ray Pohlman (bass guitar), Billy Lee Riley (harmonica), Leon Russell (piano, organ), Billy Strange (electric guitar, electric mandolin), Ron Swallow (tambourine), Tommy Tedesco (autoharp, electric guitar, mandolin), Russ Titelman (percussion (microphone boom hit with screwdriver), Julius Wechter (vibraphone, bell-tree, timpani, tambourine, congas), Jerry Williams (vibraphone, timpani), Marilyn Wilson (backing vocals), unknown (oboe, cellos, violins, violas, English horn)
**Highest chart position:** UK 6, US 4

RELEASED: JULY 5, 1965

# SUMMER DAYS (AND SUMMER NIGHTS!!)

**The genius runs wild! California girls, LSD revelations and one last traumatic fight with Dad, immortalised.** BY ANDY GILL

**Critics' Verdict**

**"They are so soppy. But the sounds that The Beach Boys produce on *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)* are again incredible."**

KARL DALLAS, MELODY MAKER, JULY 23, 1966

PERHAPS BECAUSE IT followed *Today!*, effectively a dry run for the melancholy majesty of *Pet Sounds*, *Summer Days...* is often seen as a reversion to the band's earlier teen-dream themes, almost a betrayal of Brian Wilson's growing maturity. It's not helped, in this regard, by being itself followed by *Party!*, which abandons sophistication altogether, creating the impression of an ongoing retrograde trajectory. But even a cursory (unprejudiced) listen to *Summer Days* confirms it as one of Brian's greatest achievements, stuffed with arrangements that bring a new level of complexity and sonic intrigue to material which in some cases, doesn't quite deserve the attention he lavishes upon it.

The opening track sequence, for instance, gives a deceptively backward impression about the album as a whole. "The Girl From New York City", though driving and infectious, and boasting cute hooks from both Carl Wilson's guitar and Steve Douglas' tenor sax, is essentially just a gender-switch response to The Ad Libs' recent hit. "Amusement Parks USA", another in the group's ongoing survey of teen pop-culture pastimes, following surfing and hot-rodding, is likewise a homage to Freddy Cannon's "Palisades Park", especially the organ break behind the deadpan carnival-barker section (*"Hurry, hurry, folks!"*, etc). But the bizarre banshee cackling is quite off-putting.

The castanet-driven "Then I Kissed Her" is another gender-switch cover, Brian showing he could outdo Spector on his own song, creating equivalent euphoria but with clearer separation. And "Salt Lake City" offers a bemusing celebration of the Utah capital's charms which could have been written for an ad campaign (*"They got the sun in the summer, and in the winter, the skiing is great!"*), but which is probably a shrewd nod to a Mormon market that would have responded eagerly to the band's wholesome charm and apparent family values. During the tracking session, there was widespread amusement among the musicians at Brian's instruction to them to "whack it off!" – which probably wouldn't have been appreciated by the Mormon elders.

But despite these unpromising – though never less than polished – beginnings, at least half of *Summer Days* ranks among the group's finest work. It also includes the first of Brian's works directly resulting from an LSD experience – ironically, the very same piece that would go on to become The Beach Boys' signature song, the embodiment of their all-American values. As he recalled in his autobiography, Brian was turned on to the drug by his friend Loren Schwartz, who had earlier introduced him to marijuana. "Grass had given me added creativity," he wrote, "but LSD, though I didn't know it yet, was giving me new colours to play with." After his first "mind-blowing" experience with the drug, he returned home and, as was his wont, started playing feels at his piano, aiming for a strolling C&W shuffle.

It sounded catchy, so he started improvising lines about girls, and within a week, with Mike Love's lyrical input, "California Girls" was written. It would take Brian another week, though, to come up with the odd, sun-kissed symphonic intro which offers an early harbinger of the moods and textures he'd pursue on *Pet Sounds*. Some thought it might scupper the song's airplay chances, but DJs loved the opportunity it provided for extended patter, and it became a Top 5 hit and summer standard. It was largely due to guitarists Carl Wilson and Jerry Cole struggling to get the intro's relaxing tempo just right that it took 44 takes to get a backing track. But the final song is an endlessly genial singalong, with a chorus that captures the cusp of innocence and experience, and a cunningly strategic arrangement that all comes together in Al De Lory's drop-out organ break – known as the "fairy" break – preceding the final sweeping return of the chorus harmonies, which include for the first time Bruce Johnston, soon to become a full Beach Boy.

"California Girls" is just one of a string of brilliant production coups that includes the effusive "You're So Good To Me", a 12-string stomper with some of the band's cheekiest, cheesiest doo-wop harmonies supporting Brian's playful tribute to his put-upon wife, Marilyn.

With a riff built around the union of Leon Russell's electric piano and Frank Capp's vibes, while a 12-string figure strides over them, "Let Him Run Wild" is an obvious precursor to *Pet*

AT LEAST HALF OF *SUMMER DAYS* RANKS AMONG THE GROUP'S FINEST WORK

*Sounds*. Underpinned by Jimmy Bond's upright bass, there's a Bacharach-esque tinge to the track, with lots of percussion, some fuzzy sax, and Brian's falsetto lead as the focus.

Interestingly, though some of Spector's same Wrecking Crew sessioners are used on parts of *Summer Days*, the band themselves still held down a lot of the playing roles. It's Dennis drumming on "Then I Kissed Her", for instance, and Brian on piano, with Carl playing at least three guitar parts, two of them overdubbed. And the family is to the fore on Carl's debut as lead singer, the underrated "Girl Don't Tell Me", augmented by Bruce Johnston's tinkling celesta counterpoint. There's a subtle bite to Carl's voice which deftly evokes the Beatle-ish hurt disdain of the lyric – the song was originally intended by Brian for The Beatles!

*SUMMER DAYS* IS a surprisingly poignant, reflective work which both looks fondly back at youthful fun times, while taking furtive, anxious glances at a suddenly changing future. But the most poignant part of it happened off-disc, during the vocal overdub sessions for "Help Me, Rhonda". It was the first track cut for the album, a re-recording begun even before the original version, with its limply bleating harmonica, undeveloped harmonies and weird in/out fade. Intended as a single, the new version had more cleverly constructed vocals, with Mike Love's doo-wop bass part providing the perfect springboard for the chiming higher harmonies. But the appearance of Audree and Murry Wilson at a vocal session proved a sad reminder of how far father and sons had grown apart since his sacking as their manager. As the drunken, blustering Murry barked out ill-judged "advice" from the control booth, making Al Jardine so anxious he couldn't get his lead vocal right, Brian's patience wore so thin he started shouting, "You're driving me nuts! Shut up! My ear's going out! I've got one ear left, and your big loud voice is killing it" – a deliberate reference to the partial deafness allegedly caused by Murry's violent beating of Brian as a child. From there, the session degenerated into a rambling argument, with Murry grumbling that they didn't know how to make a hit, and complaining at how long the sessions were taking, his grizzling punctuated by Brian repeatedly interjecting the phrase, "Times are changing."

He wasn't wrong. Stung by Murry's mis-timed challenge, the next day, the band nailed the vocals in two straight passes, and scored themselves a No 1. Murry would never attend another session. As a parting shot, Brian sat down and bashed out the bitter "I'm Bugged At My Ol' Man"; then, fearing it too spiteful a way to end the LP, had the group cut the brief a cappella closer "And Your Dream Comes True".

## Trackmarks SUMMER DAYS (AND SUMMER NIGHTS!!)

1. The Girl From New York City ★★★
2. Amusement Parks USA ★★★
3. Then I Kissed Her ★★★★
4. Salt Lake City ★★
5. Girl Don't Tell Me ★★★★
6. Help Me, Rhonda ★★★★★
7. California Girls ★★★★★
8. Let Him Run Wild ★★★★
9. You're So Good To Me ★★★★
10. Summer Means New Love ★★★
11. I'm Bugged At My Ole' Man ★
12. And Your Dream Comes True ★★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Produced:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** February 24 – June 4, 1965 at Gold Star Studios and Western Studios, LA
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (vocals, bass, piano, organ, timpani), Mike Love (vocals), Carl Wilson (vocals, lead, acoustic and 12-string guitars), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums, tambourine), Al Jardine (vocals, rhythm guitar), Bruce Johnston (vocals, piano, organ, celesta)
**Additional musicians:** Hal Blaine (drums, timbales), Glen Campbell (guitar), Howard Roberts (guitar), Billy Strange (rhythm guitar, ukulele, tambourine), Jerry Cole (12-string guitar), Tommy Tedesco (lead guitar), Carol Kaye (bass guitar), Ray Pohlman (bass guitar), Jimmy Bond (upright bass), Cliff Hils (upright bass), Lyle Ritz (upright bass), Leon Russell (piano, organ), Al De Lory (organ), Frank Capp (vibraphone), Roy Caton (trumpet), William Hinshaw (french horn), Steve Douglas (tenor sax), Plas Johnson (tenor sax), Jay Migliori (baritone sax), Jack Nimitz (bass sax), Billy Lee Riley (harmonica), Sid Sharp, Ralph Schaeffer, Tibor Zelig, Bernard Kundell, Leonard Malarsky, Israel Baker, Arnold Belnick, James Getzoff (violins), Harry Hyams, Joseph DiFlore (violas), Ron Swallow (tambourine), Julius Wechter (claves), Marilyn Wilson (bk vocals)
**Highest chart position:** UK 4, US 2

RELEASED: NOVEMBER 8, 1965

# BEACH BOYS' PARTY!

**The heartaches and head trips are on hold, as party-animal Mike Love takes one last strenuous opportunity to hully-gully!** BY JOHN LEWIS

## Critics' Verdict

"Raving rockers for a go-go party... they catch the beaty gaiety of The Beatles... A great disc for any get-together."
ALLEN EVANS, NME 25/2/1966

"A chart-busting Beach Boys album from the States with 12 tracks putting over the atmosphere of a beach rave-up."
MELODY MAKER 26/2/1966

SO, WHO INVENTED the unplugged session, where the hairy rock giant lets his hair down and plays acoustic versions of old favourites to a specially invited audience? MTV will claim that it was Jethro Tull's 1987 appearance on the channel that pioneered the MTV *Unplugged* show. Others suggest Pete Townshend's acoustic set at 1979's Secret Policeman's Ball, or Humble Pie's televised 1970 acoustic session. Some will say The Beatles' 1969 back-to-basics swansong *Let It Be*. Others put it a year earlier with Elvis Presley's iconic *'68 Comeback Special*. As it happens, The Beach Boys have a better claim than most with this curious little stop-gap session from 1965.

The Beach Boys had been releasing three albums a year since 1963. They'd followed up the all-conquering "California Girls" single with "The Little Girl I Once Knew", an episodic masterpiece we now appreciate as the first of Brian Wilson's teenage symphonies to God. But the single stiffed, with audiences confused by the adventurous chord changes and the dramatic lurches in tempo, while radio stations were wary of the three-second gap of dead air he had left in between each verse and chorus. "I caught hell from the record company," said Brian. "And from Mike [Love], who warned me again not to fuck with the formula."

Luckily, the band had an album ready to go before Christmas. Capitol wanted a live LP, even though the band had only released one the previous October. As a compromise, they agreed to do a virtually "live" album of covers, recorded in the studio, with their harmonised vocals accompanied by just acoustic guitars and hand percussion. Brian Wilson's controversial 1991 "autobiography" *Wouldn't It Be Nice* claims that the band all brought wives, girlfriends and friends with them to the session. "The studio looked like a giant, messy picnic," he says, "with food and bottles littered everywhere."

However, that's not entirely true. The music was recorded almost live, with some overdubs, over the course of five well-rehearsed sessions between August and September 1965 at Western Recorders in Hollywood, and the party noises were overdubbed later. It's a technique that would later be used by James Last's party-medley albums throughout the '70s: the idea being that listeners would put on the record when they had friends around to cultivate a "party" feeling. In November 2015, a mammoth, 81-track boxset – *Beach Boys' Party! Uncovered And Unplugged* – featured the original sessions before the party chatter had been added. It appears that even the ad-libs were agonised over: you can hear the band arguing about how to say "Carl, go get your bass!" to make it sound natural.

*Party!* is the sound of a band having fun, and many of the cover versions here cling to that pre-Beatles, pre-Dylan notion of American pop hedonism like some kind of life-raft. Even the titles sound like ecstatic babbles from an early, pre-literate rock'n'roll that was speaking in tongues – "Hully Gully" by The Olympics (1959), "Alley Oop" by The Hollywood Argyles (1960), "Papa-Oom-Mow-Mow" by The Rivingtons (1962) – gleeful gibberish cut from the same cloth as "Be Bop A Lula", "Da Doo Ron Ron", "Do Wah Diddy Diddy", "Woolly Bully", and *"A-wop-bop-a-loo-bop-a-lop-bam-boom!"*

That spirit of wordless ecstasy infects the song that turned the *Party!* album into a big worldwide hit: "Barbara Ann". Rock'n'roll folklore has it that Dean Torrence from Jan & Dean wandered into the studio and, when the band were wondering what songs to cover, he suggested this 1961 single by the Italian-American vocal quartet The Regents, a song that Jan & Dean had covered in 1962. It's taken faster, cleaner and a semitone higher than the Regents' version,

THE BEACH BOYS' LAST HURRAH AS THE SUN-DRENCHED, SO-CAL PARTY BAND!

and Dean even makes an uncredited performance, sharing the falsetto with Brian Wilson and turning the name into a rapturous babble.

There are other nods to early rock'n'roll. Mike Love's version of Harold Dorman's 1960 hit, "Mountain Of Love", is closer to the original version that was recorded with assorted Sun Studios hands (and without the radio-friendly string sweeteners). Mike and Brian's harmonies on The Everly Brothers' "Devoted To You" sound even more limpid and weightless than the original. And Brian Wilson's hero worship of Phil Spector results in a splendid version of The Crystals' first hit from 1961, "There's No Other (Like My Baby)" – an elegy to teenage love that fits Brian like a glove.

THE CHOICE OF contemporary covers also suggests a band that are tentatively raising a finger to check which way the cultural wind is blowing. There are not one but three Beatles songs: the uptempo pairing of "I Should Have Known Better" and "Tell Me Why" from *A Hard Day's Night* (released just over a year previously), and the Dylanesque 6/8 ballad "You've Got To Hide Your Love Away" from *Help!* (released only weeks before the session).

All, interestingly, are Lennon compositions, and all are performed in the same key as the originals. On the first pair, Carl Wilson and Al Jardine are diligently respectful, but Mike Love's jokey take on the third doesn't really suit this session – you can hear the rest of the assembled "audience" giggling and whooping on every *"Hey"*. Likewise, the reading of Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A-Changin'" is played for laughs, with Al Jardine's lead vocal undermined by Brian's one-fingered piano and by the rest of the band closing every two bars with an ecstatic, yelping *"Hey!"*.

Then Mike Love – rather rudely – seems to wreck the band's own legacy with wilfully silly versions of two of their biggest hits. As well as a goofy take on "Little Deuce Coupe" there's a clumsy, chaotic version of "I Get Around", where the lyric *"We always take my car 'cos it's never been beat,"* is changed to *"We always take my car even though it's a heap."*

The extended sessions album shows that there was plenty more in the can, and amid the interminable joshing there's some good stuff which begs to be extracted: a rollicking version of Dion's "Ruby Baby", two more Dylan songs ("Blowin' In The Wind" and "She Belongs To Me"), a stomping version of the Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction", a decent run through "California Girls", and a half-hearted fragment of "Ticket To Ride".

Not only is *Party!* the last hurrah of The Beach Boys as the definitive sun-drenched Southern Californian party band, but it sometimes feels like the last of hurrah of rock'n'roll as a hedonistic, communal music. Within a year, the shift had been made to something altogether more introspective – the acid-spiked search for the self and the preoccupation with self-expression.

## Trackmarks BEACH BOYS' PARTY!

1. Hully Gully ★★★
2. I Should Have Known Better ★★★
3. Tell Me Why ★★★
4. Papa-Oom-Mow-Mow ★★★
5. Mountain Of Love ★★★
6. You've Got To Hide Your Love Away ★★
7. Devoted To You ★★★
8. Alley Oop ★★★
9. There's No Other (Like My Baby) ★★★
10. Medley: I Get Around/ Little Deuce Coupe ★
11. The Times They Are A-Changin' ★
12. Barbara Ann ★★★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Produced:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** September 8–27, 1965 at United Western Recorders, Hollywood
**Personnel:** Al Jardine (vocals, acoustic guitar), Bruce Johnston (vocals, bass), Mike Love (vocals), Brian Wilson (vocals, bass), Carl Wilson (vocals, acoustic guitar), Dennis Wilson (vocals, percussion), Dean Torrence (vocals), Hal Blaine (ashtrays)
**Highest chart position:** UK 3, US 6

RELEASED: MAY 16, 1966

# PET SOUNDS

## The high-water mark. But is a landmark album of the 1960s actually frightened of its own decade? BY DAVID CAVANAGH

### Critics' Verdict

"Now we know why Brian Wilson doesn't tour with The Beach Boys – he's far to busy at home thinking up pet sounds. He's brought in the lot here – orchestral sounds, organs, bells, a train and dogs barking, for a start. This is the way pop LPs are going – months of preparation, unusual voicings, intricate writing, multi-tracking... It's good value."

MELODY MAKER, JULY 2, 1966

"It encompasses everything that has ever knocked me out and rolled it into one. We're all gassed by it, Brian Wilson is without a doubt, a pop genius."

ERIC CLAPTON, MELODY MAKER, JULY 30, 1966

AN OVERRATED ALBUM favoured mainly by rock critics. A gift of wonder from a young maestro tapped into the essence of the gods. "[*A*] patchy, thrown-together collection of genuinely great stuff and filler" (letter in *Uncut*, March 2016). A near-flawless 36-minute suite weakened only by the inclusion of a Bahamian folk song about sailors. A landmark in pop history, featuring the best Bahamian folk song about sailors ever recorded. A baby-boomer rite of passage. A cornball curate's egg. A masterpiece. A mish-mash. A fantasia. A fuck-with-the-formula.

There have been countless assessments of *Pet Sounds*, some of them surprisingly belligerent for an album that has not an iota of aggression in its nature (unless you count a brief skirmish in "Sloop John B"). But perhaps it's appropriate that this music provokes strong polemics, because it caused its first disputes and divisions as long ago as early 1966, even before vocals were added to Brian Wilson's remarkable backing tracks. For the other Beach Boys and for Capitol, it was supposed to be a consolidation after a successful 1965. For the 23-year-old Wilson, galvanised by the brilliance and cohesion of *Rubber Soul*, it was to be nothing less than the most ambitious 33rpm pop record ever attempted.

Looking at the band's schedule for January 1966, it's odd to think that Brian's adventures in the recording studios of Hollywood, viewed within the context of The Beach Boys' career at the time, were probably considered less important than a two-week Japanese tour undertaken by Mike, Carl, Dennis, Al and Bruce that month. While the stripy-shirted lads performed in Sendai, Yokohama and Shizuoka, Brian – all of 5,500 miles away – marshalled the Wrecking Crew in United Western and Gold Star, familiarising them with the elaborate arrangements of "Wouldn't It Be Nice" and "Let's Go Away For Awhile". Nowadays, of course, that Japanese tour wouldn't register on a list of The Beach Boys' 100 most significant events. January '66, we can see, was all about Brian. It was about his rivalry with Lennon-McCartney; his increasingly sophisticated chord progressions; his ever more advanced harmonies and basslines; his innovative ideas about colour and texture that made even veteran session musicians look a bit differently at their instruments. "He played fugues within fugues," remarked Jerry Cole, one of two guitarists whose detuned 12-strings, played high on the neck to resemble harps, are the first sounds to be heard on the album.

In the sleevenotes to the 1997 boxset, *The Pet Sounds Sessions*, some of Cole's fellow players were moved to compare the young Brian to Mozart, Bach and Beethoven. The present-day Brian offered some scattered thoughts in the foreword, in his strange manchild-speak. "I can remember it behoved me to want to create something that people could say, 'That's a good piece of love, of spiritual love.'" But if anyone groaned at the language of the booklet, two CDs' worth of gasp-inducing backing tracks soon shut them up. The sound of Brian building song after majestic song from the foundations up, those discs allowed the listener to stand at the back of the room and watch, fascinated, as configurations of 15 or 20 musicians were assembled to Brian's singular specifications – two pianos and three basses, maybe, or four saxophones and eight violins – at which point the dozens of individual fragments would interlock into the most complex of heavenly patterns. Somehow, even with only 50 per cent hearing, he was able to sense that a theremin, a slide guitar or a bicycle bell would be the consummate *coup de théâtre* here, while the massed ranks of vocal harmonies would overlap spectacularly there. Visualising the music like Hitchcock storyboarding a movie, he filled each song with goose-pimple touches – the flutes in "God Only Knows", the basses pulsing like heartbeats in "Don't Talk (Put Your Head On My Shoulder)" – that would send shivers of pleasure rippling down spines hundreds of listens later.

ENCOURAGED BY *Rubber Soul* to think of a concept that would unite his songs, Brian co-wrote eight of them with an unknown lyricist, Tony Asher, an advertising copywriter whom he'd met by chance at United Western in 1965. Asher hadn't thought their meeting particularly auspicious, but it would become clear, as they began writing together, that Brian trusted him on a deep level, needing Asher to get into his head and interpret his unexpressed feelings, his existential anxieties and his highly romanticised views of women. *Pet Sounds* begins with two teenagers wishing they were married so they could sleep together. It ends with Caroline's childhood sweetheart

IT WAS TO BE NOTHING LESS THAN THE MOST AMBITIOUS 33RPM POP RECORD EVER

unable to hide his dismay when he learns she's lost her virginity ("Caroline, No"). Boys are scared. Girls are growing into unrecognisable creatures. Girls need boys. But boys have to be patient, sensing that girls want to be comforted, not seduced. It may be Asher holding the pencil, but the desperate longing on *Pet Sounds* for innocence – almost a reversing of the forward march of the Permissive Society – is an emotion that we at once identify with Brian. *Pet Sounds* may be a cultural high-water mark of the '60s, but it seems frightened of its decade, pining for a life without change and without pressure, a life reduced to a warm house, a sweet-natured friend and a far-off dream of marriage. When we think what pressure would do to Brian less than 12 months later, it's ever so poignant to hear him sing these hesitant words of adolescence – and sing them, too, in a pure, high, feminine voice wholly at odds with the macho gruffness of his father's generation. In a world where change means danger, where can a boy like Brian feel secure? Independence is too chilling a notion ("That's Not Me"), but the house of Murry Wilson was no child's idea of a place of safety, so the only solution is to inhabit the havens that Brian designs for his own protection. The solution is to live in *Pet Sounds*.

And so, while the songs of Bob Dylan may have broached far bigger topics in the '60s than any Beach Boys song, we shouldn't forget that Brian Wilson was capable of asking profound questions, too. Every day in every town, sons and daughters leave home, embark on college courses, pack up and split for the city. Will they miss their home? Will they do what Brian couldn't and move imperceptibly into adulthood? Or will they find, half a century after it was written, reflections of themselves in *Pet Sounds*?

## Trackmarks PET SOUNDS

1. Wouldn't It Be Nice ★★★★★
2. You Still Believe In Me ★★★★★
3. That's Not Me ★★★★
4. Don't Talk (Put Your Head On My Shoulder) ★★★★★
5. I'm Waiting For The Day ★★★★★
6. Let's Go Away For Awhile ★★★★★
7. Sloop John B ★★★★★
8. God Only Knows ★★★★★
9. I Know There's An Answer ★★★★★
10. Here Today ★★★★★
11. I Just Wasn't Made For These Times ★★★★★
12. Pet Sounds ★★★★★
13. Caroline, No ★★★★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Produced:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** July 12, 1965 – April 13, 1966 at United Western Recorders, Gold Star Studios, Sunset Sound Recorders and CBS Columbia Square, Hollywood
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (lead, harmony and bk vocals, piano, organ, sound effects, dog whistles), Mike Love (lead, harmony and bk vcl), Carl Wilson (lead, harmony and bk vcl, guitar), Al Jardine (lead, harmony and bk vcl), Dennis Wilson (harmony and bk vcl, drums), Bruce Johnston (harmony and bk vcl)
**Additional musicians:** Al Casey, Glen Campbell, Mike Deasy (guitar), Jerry Cole , Barney Kessel (guitar, mandolin), Bill Pittman, Billy Strange (guitar), Tommy Tedesco (acoustic guitar), Al De Lory (piano, organ, harpsichord), Don Randi (piano), Larry Knechtel (organ), Mike Melvoin (harpsichord), Tony Asher (plucked piano strings), Paul Tanner (electro-theremin), Carl Fortina, Frank Marocco (accordion), Carole Kaye (electric bass), Ray Pohlman (electric bass, guitar, mandolin), Chuck Berghofer (string bass), Lyle Ritz (string bass, uke), Hal Blaine (drums, timpani, bongos), Ritchie Frost, Jim Gordon (drums, perc), Nick Martinis (drums), Frank Capp (vibraphone, glockenspiel, bells, perc), Julius Wechter (vibraphone, timpani, perc), Terry Melcher (tambourine), Gary Coleman (bongos, timpani), Jerry Williams (perc), Tommy Morgan (harmonica), Steve Douglas (sax, clarinet, flute, perc), Jay Migliori (sax, clarinet, flute), Bill Green (flute, sax, perc), Jim Horn (flute, sax), Paul Horn, Jack Nimitz (sax), Leonard Hartman (clarinet, bass clarinet, cor anglais), Jules Jacob (flute), Plas Johnson (flute, sax, perc), Bobby Klein (sax), Roy Caton (trumpet), Gail Martin, Ernie Tack (trombone), Alan Robinson (French horn), Arnold Belnik, James Getzoff, William Kurasch, Leonard Malarsky, Jerome Reisler, Ralph Schaeffer, Sid Sharp, Tibor Zelig (violin), Norman Botnick, Joseph DiFiore, Harry Hyams, Darrel Terwilliger (viola), Justin DiTullio, Jesse Erlich, Joseph Saxon (cello)
**Highest chart position:** UK 2, US 10

Playback time: Brian Wilson working on *Pet Sounds* in LA, 1966

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

# "We've evolved 800 per cent in the last year"

At home in Los Angeles, Brian is plotting the mind-blowing evolution of his band: away from "terrible records" like "Barbara Ann", towards the complexity of *Pet Sounds*, "Good Vibrations" and beyond. His bandmates, meanwhile, arrive in Europe to scenes of general hysteria. "Don't you just love people?" says Dennis, as his leg is nearly yanked off. "I love people."

In perfect harmony: *(l–r)* Al Jardine, Carl Wilson, Brian Wilson and Mike Love in '66

## MELODY MAKER MARCH 19, 1966

IF you think "Barbara Ann" is indicative of the real Beach Boys scene today, you can forget it. It's not. "It wasn't even a produced record," Brian Wilson, Beach Boys leader told me on the phone from his elaborate Beverly Hills home. "We were just goofing around for a party type album and that was just an old rock'n'roll hit. Somebody in Boston started playing the track in the LP and this just started it all off so they had to put out a single. I don't know how to explain it. That kind of rock'n'roll is just timeless I guess. But that's not The Beach Boys. It's not where we're at, at all. Personally, I think the group has evolved another 800 per cent in the last year. We have a more conscious, arty production now that's more polished. It's all been like an explosion for us.

"For myself, I don't go out on the tours at all now. I just work on production. I've spent five months working on this new album and I think this album and the batch of new singles I've been working on, well, it's like I'm right in the golden era of what it's all about. It's all just coming out like breathing now. I give a lot of credit, a lot of it, for everybody's success, to The Beatles. They've had a tremendous, universal influence. That *Rubber Soul* album was a great new contribution. It helped them reach a new plateau. The Byrds, well, they represent a certain projected attitude. They've got a place too, no doubt about that. I still give Phil Spector credit for being the single most influential producer. He's timeless. He makes a milestone whenever he goes into a studio.

"The folk thing has been important. I think it has opened up a whole new intellectual bag for the kids. They're making 'thinking' records now. That's really what it is. Everybody is saying something. We got into a romantic rut. It was all boy-girl, crying records with everybody kind of screwed up.

"Suddenly Dylan comes along with a cold, intellectual, philosophical thing. He's a protester and his message pertains to society in general.

"I predict all this protesting will become highly personal and pertaining to a person's own hang-ups and his ego. The lyrics will be more introspective. There'll always be love records, of course. There's no stronger single theme. But you'll find plenty of thinking records, too.

"Sure, all this has helped The Beach Boys evolve. We listen to what's happening and it affects what we do too. The trends have influenced my work, but so has my own scene. I've got this terrific house in the hills with a tremendous view. It's stimulating and it's helped me mature. I may even get married.

"I remember when I used to think marriage was a hang-up to the image. That's no more. The Beatles have brought so many things to the industry, like Lennon's being married right along. His being married was so perfect, so beautiful because it enabled so many artists to be married and still be considered an artist. Marriage has no bearing on a girl fan's adoration for an artist anymore. Two of our guys, Mike Love and Al Jardine, are already married.

"They live down on the ocean at Manhattan Beach (California). They both have houses there. My brothers, Carl and Dennis, also have their own houses here in the hills above Hollywood.

"I've been working on this especially, since I'm here at home while Bruce Johnston takes my place with the boys. A lot of new things are already recorded, including our next single, 'Sloop John B', so we're turning our attention to the movies. I think we've done great on the personal appearance trail and the boys have done terrifically overseas, especially just recently in Japan and Hong Kong, and we think now the obvious next step is pictures."

*REN GREVATT*

## MELODY MAKER MAY 28, 1966

"Well, you see, we had five days off after our four-week tour of the States, so I thought I'd visit Britain and do a bit of hustling," said 23-year old Bruce Johnston.

Being a Beach Boy is a full-time job. Bruce joined the five surfing Beach Boys 14 months ago when maestro Brian Wilson was ill and he's been with them ever since. In Britain for the first time last week, Bruce was scouting out for the rest of the boys who, minus Brian, will visit England for a tour in September. "I want to find out what the scene is *now* in Britain. I'll let the boys know how our records are being accepted and what is happening over here," adds Bruce.

Bruce has now done 46 sides with The Beach Boys and he hasn't missed a session yet.

"I've been fortunate enough not to be caught sick," Bruce says, "because sometimes when Brian has an idea, he'll phone us up and we'll do a recording session in the middle of the night. We leave just about all the musical side of the business to Brian. He does the writing and arranging. We sit and put on record what he has worked out. Much of his composing evolves in the studio on the very session itself.

"You gotta admire that, so far so good. We haven't missed the Top 10 in the States for three-and-a-half years," smiled Johnston through his ice-cold Coke.

"The thing to remember about Brian Wilson is that, as complex as he is, he is still aware of that big, big, market for such terrible records as

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

'Barbara Ann'." Nevertheless there is not very much terrible about the new Beach Boys LP, *Pet Sounds*, which Bruce brought with him from the States.

"It cost us so much money to make, you wouldn't believe it," he groaned. "But I'm happy to say we are all knocked out with it. Brian recorded it in four different studios, which gives you some idea of the lengths he went to."

Bruce went into technical, lengthy explanations concerning the voicing on one of the *Pet Sounds* tracks. "We state the main theme which is based on a fugue – here the voices come in one by one, there's Brian over the top. He uses his instruments well, you notice. Although he has a 40-piece orchestra and six voices under his control, he will only use one voice with one cello."

Bruce announced that he would be producing records again.

"I'm a producer again. I used to make the Ripchords tracks and I've done a lot of work with my partner, Terry Melcher, and now I'm going to do some stuff with Tony Rivers And The Castaways.

They're a good little group y'know. I'll get them a hit, I think."

He's very probably right!

***MELODY MAKER***

## MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 12, 1966

ARE the five touring Beach Boys merely puppets of sound genius Brian Wilson?

The question is prompted by the vast blast of publicity which has proclaimed Wilson as the complete architect of The Beach Boys' recorded sound. Are they just the instruments which BW uses to paint his pop pictures in sound – like the marvellous moods of "Good Vibrations" and the precedent-setting *Pet Sounds* album?

The five touring Beach Boys (minus BW who stayed at home in California to dream up more surrealistic sounds) arrived in Britain from Stockholm on Sunday afternoon.

"No, we are not just Brian's puppets," said BW's brother Carl, who plays lead guitar and is the occasional lead singer for the group. "Brian plays the major creative role in the production of our music, but everyone in the group contributes something to the finished product. It's not like an orchestra translating the wishes of the conductor. We all have a part to play in the production of the records.

"Brian works out the basic arrangement before we ever go into the studio. We run through it a few times and there are often suggestions made about changes or improvements. Everybody contributes ideas. We all give something, although I agree that Brian contributes the major part."

Carl didn't think that Brian would ever rejoin the group as an active touring singer. "I can't see that ever happening now," he said. "He's writing and creating all the time now. You only have to look at him sometimes to see that he's got something going inside him."

Did Carl think that the time spent by The Beach Boys – and The Beatles – on retakes, new arrangements, sheer hard work, was setting a trend in the pop record world?

"It's not a trend. If you spend that amount of time in a studio, the end product has to be something special. We work hard to produce an end product of a high standard. It takes us a long time. If other people can do it in a short time, that's fine. But a lot of people aren't doing this. They aren't prepared to go into a studio and work. And it shows. You can tell from their albums which artists are really working on their records."

Carl felt strongly that criticisms of the group for not producing a 'studio sound' onstage were unjustified.

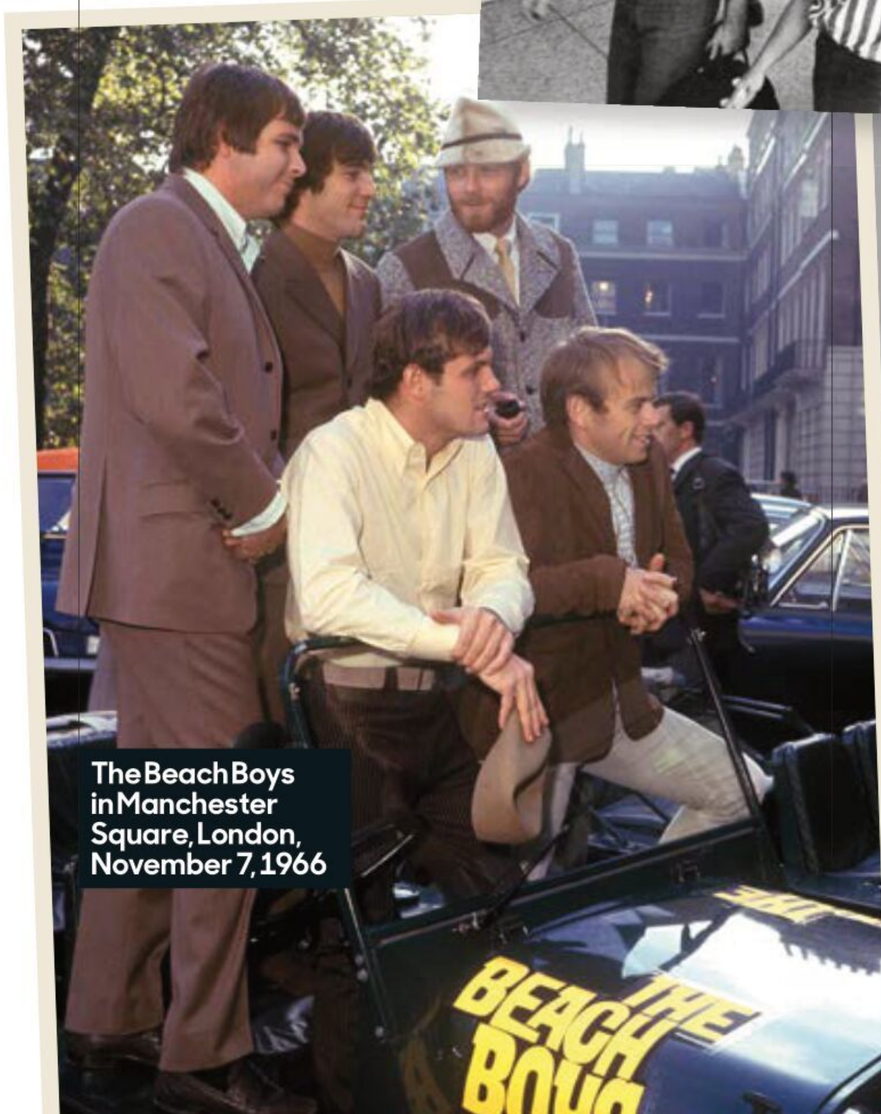
"It's idiotic to get hung up not being able to reproduce the sound. We know we can't and I think it's wrong for people to expect us to."

How do the group's voices stand up to a long tour such as the one they are on at the moment?

"Pretty well. Although you have to watch it a bit. Travelling is the worst thing. For example, we come off stage pretty hot and if we have to travel straight off somewhere, there's danger of catching colds, particularly if the weather's very cold. But the voices get plenty of exercise on stage and we rest them at other times. So it works out all right."

The Beach Boys have progressed tremendously over the past few years. What of their future – how did Carl see them progressing over the next two or three years?

"We have to broaden ourselves musically. How? Well, we have a few ideas about increasing our musical scope. But they are still tentative and we can't say too much about them at the moment."



The Beach Boys in Manchester Square, London, November 7, 1966

Looks as though The Beach Boys' vibrations are going to be very good for quite some time to come. ***ALAN WALSH***

## NME NOVEMBER 11, 1966

MY first mistake was trying to escape from London airport on Sunday morning, through approximately a thousand fans, with drummer Dennis Wilson, whom I later discovered, has been voted the Beach Boy most likely to get torn apart. We broke out of a side entrance from the Customs hall with PR Roger Easterby leading the charge, the man with the scream-appeal, Dennis Wilson, a length behind, and myself bringing up the rear.

A scream like several hundred Apache squaws in search of a scalp broke the air and a woman bearing a passing resemblance to Johnny Weissmuller engaged Dennis and attempted a step-over hold on his left leg while a smaller mortal clung barnacle-like to his right leg. This hampered his movements somewhat, but it was not for nothing that he was champion youth wrestler of California and with a supreme effort we made the inside of the Austin Princess limo.

Our successful arrival in the car was somewhat marred by the fact that Dennis discovered he still had the young lady in charge of his right leg. We attempted to eject her through the car door – through which another 500 fans tried to squeeze and an obliging policeman entered into the spirit of the thing by trying to push her back. As the car moved forward we discovered her reluctance to leave us had something to do with the door being jammed on her leg. After a further few yards it prised loose, or broke off, I'm not sure which and our chauffeur decided it was time to 'surf-off' and leave the others to fend for themselves.

"Don't you just love people?" said Dennis. "I love people," he smiled coolly and waved from the windows to our self-appointed vanguard of scooters, motorbikes and cars with the written placards bearing the words "This car is fitted with 'Good Vibrations'".

"The kids are wonderful," eulogised Dennis – he meant it. "Look at this guy on his motorbike – I have a BSA at home but I piled up on a mountain road with Doris Day's son Terry Melcher just before coming over here. Cut my hands up." He showed me the scars on the palms of his hands.

Dennis is The Beach Boy who believes in living dangerously. He gives his manager a minor heart attack every time he steps out on the drag strip, dressed in spaceman-like tunic to drive his 'Cobra' hurtling down

RB/REDFERNS

the course at speeds over 200mph. "I beat the world record for the quarter mile," said Dennis nonchalantly. "You just don't think about the danger. I figure if something happens at that speed – what are you going to know about it?"

He hurls the word 'beautiful' about like someone invented it for him – uses the word 'love' in a spiritual sense – talks about men's clothes being 'pretty' and declares sincerely that the fans' welcome gave him "a nice feeling inside".

We arrived in the Hilton Hotel suite – Dennis walked out on the balcony overlooking Hyde Park and the Serpentine and the greater portion of London's smoke stacks and declared it was 'pretty'.

Being well attuned to personal vibrations he sensed the hunger pangs in the air and, by the time that brother Carl arrived, the steaks were on the table. Carl is a very palpable person – his broad, stocky figure gives him obvious physical presence and his voice is quiet and subdued. Just subdued enough to let you know there is a mind whirling about under those benign features. All the Wilsons – particularly, I would think, Brian, whose presence you can feel through the other two – have a deeply religious conviction underlining their work and lives.

"We believe in God as a kind of universal consciousness," said Carl. "God is love – God is you – God is me – God is everything right here in this room. It's a spiritual concept which inspires a great deal of our music.

"Surfing and surf music was very much a reflection of that particular period in our lives. We are trying to be just as honest in our present compositions; they are a reflection – in musical terms – of our thoughts and ideas now." One of the highlights of their completed European tour for the Wilsons was a visit to a 600-year-old church in Vienna where they attended Mass and sat entranced throughout the service.

At the concert that night at Finsbury Park Astoria we entered the stage door with Cathy McGowan and ran into Bruce Johnston wandering about backstage wrapped in overcoat and scarf like it was his last day on earth. Bruce was plainly nervous.

"I'm worried about my throat," he explained. "My voice is almost clapped out. I've done so much singing on this tour and I've got a sore throat. We're very conscious of the fact that people are expecting a lot from us and I couldn't bear to be the one who let them down."

Bruce is an immediately likeable person – "the Beach Boys ambassador in tennis shoes" – who, to the horror of his publicist has a tendency to drop the quotable clanger like "we're faceless wonders but it doesn't matter" – all of which only makes him more likeable.

The group's dressing room was an interesting spectacle of controlled chaos with those admitted all talking at once, including promoter Arthur Howes in his Humphrey Bogart leather hat, Pete Whitehead completing his film for *Top Of The Pops*, Lulu being complimented on her singing by Mike Love, and Dick Duryea going quietly out of his mind with a stop watch on a cord around his neck.

Mike Love is the Beach Boy with the hat and the beard. In addition to this, he has acquired a monstrous pipe in Denmark –"my façade" – in which he smoked something which everyone agreed smells remarkably like Christmas pudding. He is most definitely not a Beach Boy, and as the oldest member entitled to be considered a Beach Man. He smiles when he means it – laughs most often with his eyes and has a flair for saying the funny thing at the right time.

Bruce Johnston *(left)* with Carl Wilson, Jardine and Love, London, November 14, 1996

CHRIS MORPHET/REDFERNS

"We wanted to bring an orchestra with us," said Mike. "When we heard that the concerts were sold out in two days we figured there was going to be a lot of screamers so better maybe to leave the orchestra to next time."

Monday morning found the group facing a Beatle-sized battery of cameras outside EMI House in Manchester Square. At the press reception they were amiable, loveable, neutral and predictable. Mike Love answered questions like "Is this your first visit?" without so much of a flinch – Al Jardine smiled reflectively on being asked his hobbies and Dennis Wilson said he liked The Beatles. Dennis Wilson also said he was not hysterically happy at finding himself imprisoned in a room containing about 500 people designed to accommodate 100 comfortably, and our British air-conditioning was not "wunnerful".

Finding a semi-deserted corridor outside, Mike Love took the opportunity to talk with their music publishers, Andrew Oldham and Tony Calder (Immediate). They talked of their new LP, *Smile*, which is being released later this year, and of which it was said by Dennis – "In my opinion it makes *Pet Sounds* stink – that's how good it is." I got a sneak preview of one of the tracks the previous night when Dennis played me a piano version of one track, "Child Of The Man", a cowboy song, and then gave me the throwaway line of the year – "And this is a prayer I'm working on for it!"

Back at the Hilton we sat around talking about things the Wilsons like and, for those who like lists, here's one: Tim Hardin, Graham Nash of The Hollies, Ferrari racing cars, Noel Harrison, making paper aeroplanes, fire engines, wrapping, Indian stamping, Bobby Darin, karate, positive thinking, the *Revolver* LP, the Atlantic Ocean at night and green hills which you see from trains and can never run up.

Carl was beginning to get claustrophobic from being confined too long, so we took out an expedition to Carnaby Street to buy clothes. Carl entrenched himself in a boutique where he bought three trouser suits and a ring for his wife, while Dennis and I went off to see tailor Duggie Millings. Back to the hotel, where a supply of LPs was provided, hot chocolate, Coke and milk were ordered – and the night was talked away. The Beach Boys are a success because they sing well, play well, live well and have a musical genius hiding in Beverly Hills writing for them – Brian Wilson!

***KEITH ALTHAM***

**NME** NOVEMBER 18, 1966

AMONG those getting in each other's way in The Beach Boys' dressing room at Hammersmith Odeon on Monday night were publicist Derek Taylor (minus moustache), promoter Arthur Howes (minus hat), PR Roger Easterby (minus glasses), Lulu (minus Luv[v]ers), Andrew Oldham (plus Tony Calder), tour manager Dick Duryea (minus his mind), sundry journalists, and Gordon Waller (plus charabanc party)!

Bearded Mike Love was lying prone across the middle of the floor with his right leg propped up against the dressing room table and his eyes tightly closed, repeating softly to himself – "I am co-operating – I am co-operating!"

Peter Whitehead, making his second film for BBC1's *Top Of The Pops* (Thursday, November 17), collapsed into a chair and aimed his cine-camera at Mike, saying soothingly, "Now, I don't want anything

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# BRIAN WILSON

pop think in

## 'More and more kids are thinking love and peace and friendship'

**PEACE**
Relative peace must be nice in New York.

**FEAR**
Not knowing what to expect is the only reason for fear.

**DRUNK**
I don't know anyone who gets drunk. In fact, I haven't been drunk myself for three years. There's no point in it. It isn't really fun. Why bother?

**HONESTY**
It's great and groovy and kicks all rolled into one big mind-blower. No one should be without it.

**SUICIDE**
It only makes things worse. You can't solve anything by killing yourself. I mean, things can always get better, but if you're dead, they may not.

**WATTS**
It's only four miles from my original home, where my mother still lives. We didn't panic — she just didn't go outside the house.

**CRIME**
Very consistent.

**POLICE**
They're nice men, I think.

**KOREA**
I was about 11 years old and primarily concerned with baseball.

**JUVENILE DELINQUENCY**
There seems to be a trend toward non-violence today. More and more kids are thinking love and peace and friendship, instead of hate and spite.

**SCHOOL**
I wonder how much longer school will be compulsory? Very soon, I think, education will not only be free-form, but free for the taking or leaving.

**TIME**
Time is fine when it's in cadence.

**STEREO**
I can't enjoy stereo much. I'm deaf in one ear.

**EAR**
The right one.

**DRUGS**
An underground train.

**PATRIOTISM**
Beer and brass bands.

**HYMN**
I think I can write one someday.

**ORGAN**
My dad gave me a pipe-organ for my birthday—that's what I'll write the hymn on. Or at.

**DOOR**
The door has been opened to a whole universe of experience for me.

**NEWSPAPER**
I don't read the newspapers too much because they depress me.

**SWIMMING POOL**
I have just rediscovered the delights of swimming. I'm completely turned on to swimming pools again. For a while, they bored me. Now I take a swim once a day and I'm completely healthy.

**ALBUM**
Our next album will be better than "Pet Sounds". It will be as much an improvement over "Sounds" as that was over "Summer Days".

**RECORDING STUDIO**
My recording studio has become a castle, with a wing for everyone.

**TELEVISION**
Someday I want to make commercials for TV—with a new twist.

**DRUMS**
Someday I want to write a symphony for drums.

**HOLLYWOOD BOWL**
The sound men at the Bowl are not rock 'n' roll sound men. I would advise people who want to play there and sound good, to change their plans or plan their changes.

**SURFING**
It's a very challenging sport. I've never been able to meet the challenge.

**LYRICS**
Let's make them all free form, so we don't get hung up on making rhymes.

**DRUG SONGS**
There are myriad drug songs on the pop music market today. I don't know which they are.

**MIRROR**
Have you tried the mirror technique of the subconscious? I'm reading a book about it—I'm fascinated by the mind and hypnosis and things like that.

**CAR**
One day everyone will sit up in his car and fall out to the groovy sounds of cartridge tapes. Do I sound like a commercial?

**SUCCESS**
Came very easily to me, professionally speaking.

**GLASSES**
I would recommend that everyone who gets eye strain when they read go to an optometrist and get reading glasses so that they can read more and longer. This is what I did, and I really do think everyone should do it.

**RAIN**
It's purifying. It cleanses the earth and help things grow. It's spiritual, too.

**AUTOGRAPHS**
I would suggest to every girl who collects autographs that she has them analysed. Amazing revelations.

**THE MOON**
Funny you should mention that—I've been reading a book about moon deities and about how the moon affects women's personalities. Fascinating.

**PUBLICISTS**
Professional wordsm

posed – just try to imagine I'm not here."

Mike opened one eye – "That's going to be pretty difficult," he said.

"Y'see, you're sitting all over my fucking stage clothes!"

Dennis Wilson was zipping up his mustard-coloured suede boots in an attempt to get out, but was in a typically warm, friendly mood.

"I just love people," he said (he says it quite often). "We're delighted to be No 1 in the *NME*. I don't understand why everyone keeps on about 'Good Vibrations' being complicated, though.

"I don't call it complicated – I call it fun. We just want people to have a good time – we're recording music to make people happy.

"People seem to have got hung up on this fusion of classical and pop music. Really, our ideas are very simple. I remember Brian once listening to Beethoven's 'Symphony No 4' and looking up afterward he said: 'You know, I've just realised I'm a musical midget.' You must excuse me now, I have a Rolls-Royce to catch."

The Rolls belonged to Andrew, of course, and ever since spotting it outside the press reception at EMI Manchester Square last week, Dennis has been attempting to buy one.

Mike Love had struggled into a vertical position, found that small chimney, which he is disposed to call a pipe, and with a full head of steam was attempting to look in six directions at once for photographs.

He spoke to me about their experiences on the European half of the tour and the more recent trip to the North of England.

"Germany was fantastic," recalled Mike. "They really believe in security precautions out there. When we arrived at the airport there were about 300 police to meet us – we just walked into the lobby, threw up our hands and surrendered! The people were real nice."

There are few things guaranteed to move Dennis Wilson in a physical sense, but one of them is Dick Duryea – a kind of human reactor on two legs and when he goes "live" look-out.

Dick with a hustle on sounds like his famous actor father – Dan Duryea – heading up a wagon train in a hurry.

"Wow – when Dick gets bugged he really frightens me," Dennis told me once. He "really blows up".

Mike found it difficult to account for his movements in the North, but seemed to remember Manchester.

"I walked about the town in the pouring rain in my moccasins," said Mike. "Herman and Freddy came with us, and Lulu, and we toured a few clubs."

Dennis returned at this point, complaining bitterly, "That nasty Andrew Oldham locked me in his car and forced me to drink whisky," but he was smiling when he said it.

He sat quietly in a corner listening to the hubbub of conversation, and every now and then would scream "SHUTUP!" at the top of his voice, because it was what everyone else wanted to do and hadn't got the nerve, and it made him feel better.

**"PEOPLE GET HUNG UP ON THIS FUSION OF CLASSICAL AND POP MUSIC. REALLY, OUR IDEAS ARE VERY SIMPLE"**
DENNIS WILSON

Derek Taylor says that "Dennis is going through a thing rather like George Harrison did", which is interesting if not crystal clear.

Al Jardine came bustling into the room looking for sandwiches and paused to survey his blond thatch in the mirror – he extracted a strand of hair and surveyed it despondently. I volunteered the consoling premise that all intelligent men eventually went bald.

"I'd rather be stupid, have hair and earn money," replied the astute Mr Jardine.

Bruce Johnston was engaged in conversation with a woman journalist who wanted him to say how much he liked English girls and their fashion. "Sure I love English girls – they look real nice, but I've got a Swedish girl with me." Which rather wrapped up that angle.

I learned from Mike that the next Beach Boys film being sent from the States for showing on British TV is all about a fire-engine. The boys are shown in the station, asleep in the beds. A bell rings and Brian Wilson slides up the fire pole.

The following shots show The Beach Boys tearing along the street to jump on the already rolling engine and the result, I am informed, is a riot.

Someone yelled, "Beach Boys onstage" and that well-known thermo-nuclear pile – Dick Duryea went 'live' and did a quick 'head 'em up – move 'em out'.

The Beach Boys filed out with Peter Whitehead wedged in the middle with his whirring machine to face their last audience on this tour.

Before departing for a final, now almost traditional end of tour party at the London China Garden, Mike informed me they hoped to be back in the spring. As people and artists they will be most welcome.

***KEITH ALTHAM***

pop think in

MM DECEMBER 3, 1966

# AL JARDINE

## BILL HALEY

Haven't read an article on Bill Haley for ages. I must have bought every bloody record he ever made. When Haley was happening was about the time I first got involved in music. I'd pay a lot of dollars to be able to see that guy work. Here and now! In the rock'n'roll bag he is undoubtedly fantastic. Whatever bag he's in, it's fantastic. When I think of Haley, I don't just think of him but the whole group. That bass player and drummer. He has a group image.

## CALIFORNIA GIRLS

"California Girls" the song? My concept of what most people feel The Beach Boys are or should be. That is, a nice compromise between the sophisticated and the simple-heads. Everyone loves it 'cos it's completely passé – and outdated by Brian Wilson's standards. Easy to sing and identify with. Everything was there.

## RONALD REAGAN

That makes me think of the last campaign speech of Governor Brown, who was governor of California, held in a very small park near Manhattan Beach before about three hundred people. I was sitting on the bank, watching this guy – a real professional politician – and thinking: "What is it all about!" And now Ronald Reagan in the governor. I was very surprised to see Reagan had won. Surprise is the best description I can think of for my reaction.

## BOBBIES

Very sharp. Very good. I have a good impression of your cops. A clean, well-kept, well-organised look about them. Amiable on the whole, none of that ego thing – hey man, I'm a cop!

## BIG HEADS

Definitely something that's easy to acquire when you've sold 20 million records. I think we've managed to keep our senses. This was partly due to The Beatles who suddenly swept up in America. The retaliation of The Beatles and English pop music came just when we were beginning to get very big in America. The mystique of the English groups distracted everybody's attention. We were in Australia when we heard rumours about this group – The Beatles. Man, when we heard "I Want To Hold Your Hand", we thought somebody was puttin' us on! Anyway the English groups cleaned up. Even our records didn't sell as well as usual, although I must admit they weren't as good as they should have been. The thing is, the coming of the English invasion gave us a chance to look at ourselves and reflect. I now feel our success is completely legitimate. If we'd got in there years before The Beatles hit America – or waited until years after – our true position as far as popularity was concerned may have been false. We had time to think. Brian realised the position and had time to develop musically. He grew while all the English thing was happening – and sometimes I'm still amazed we ever survived it. When the disc we issued flopped amidst all the English records, we sat down, analysed the situation, and then took off in another direction. That was when Brian decided to give up touring as he wasn't writing like he should have been. I think we came out of the whole thing quite well. There's more to say – have you got space?

## WATTS

Just talking about that the other day. I could go on for pages about this. The tragic result of our urbanisation and lack of city planning – which is a cop-out for what it really is! The obvious neglect either of the white or the black, to want, or to need, better education and/or better housing. Basically one of the laws of nature is the need to survive and adapt. Something that exists in everyone. I don't think the blacks have adapted. They have got to maintain themselves at some point – like the Jews, Russians, Japanese, anybody.

## HI-LOS

Something I never got in to. Never got in to their sound at all. Not like The Four Freshmen, anyway. The Hi-Los are a bit too high. Brian and I, when we started, used to listen to the Freshmen, but The Hi-Los were a bit too far out.

## IVY LEAGUE

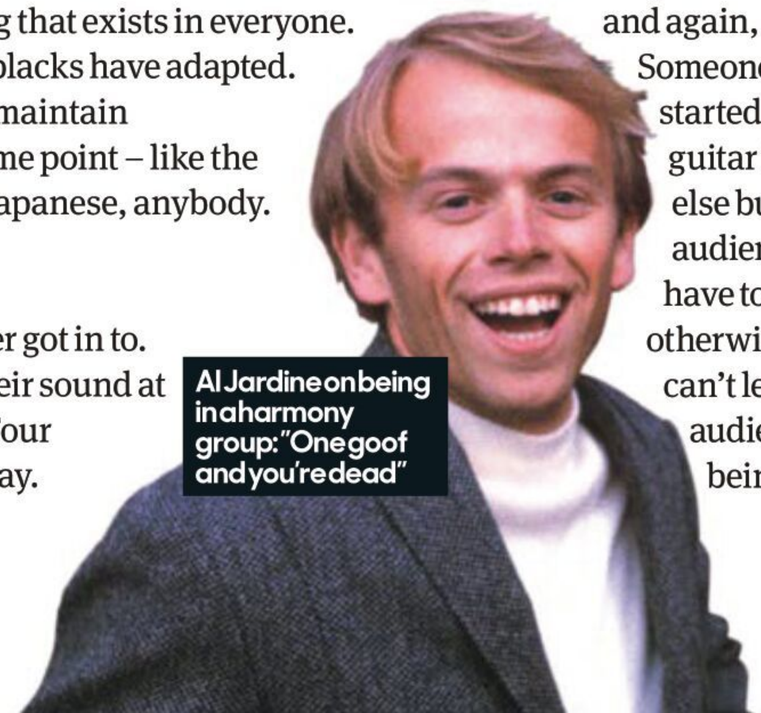
In the terms of on-the-campus and all that, I just think immediately of the fantastic acceptance of The Beach Boys. The campus thing is one big college – a big fraternity sharing their studies, books, space, booze, love, drugs, care and clothes.

## THROATS

Ours must be the most critical in the country. The trouble is, our fans are also the most critical and now the audiences just sit there dead silent – listening. Before, they didn't. One could always rely on some shouting and screaming to give us time to relax our voices for a moment but now they're taking up listening. One goof and you're dead. If we make a mistake on our harmonies we try to hit back quickly with the force of the number and usually the audience forgets your goof. But man, you die inside all the same. At the second house we played in Tooting, I remember the audience was dead silent, cool, and listening to every little thing. You think of The Beatles. They don't have to worry because they've got this onslaught of noise all the time and their performance can relax off every now and again, and the crowd won't notice. Someone told me that George Harrison started playing "Woolly Bully" on the guitar in the middle of something else but, like, nobody heard it. If the audience are cool and listening, you have to be cool and listening, otherwise you might goof. You can't let yourself go on attentive audiences. So it's quite a strain being a harmony group.

**"WHEN WE HEARD 'I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND', WE THOUGHT SOMEBODY WAS PUTTIN' US ON"**

AL JARDINE



Al Jardine on being in a harmony group: "One goof and you're dead"

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

# "ONE OF THE GREATEST LPS EVER"

## Eric Clapton is clearly impressed. But what do other pop stars of 1966 think about the new Beach Boys album, *Pet Sounds*? *Melody Maker* decides to find out...

**MM** JULY 30, 1966

WHAT do you think of *Pet Sounds*? Does the huge orchestra put you off? Or do you agree it is "the most progressive pop album ever". Do the arrangements knock you out – or do you find the lyrics about as sickly as a vat of peanut butter? Well, remember The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* LP, within a week of its release crashed the album charts in both Britain and America.

The record's impact on artists has been considerable. The lengthy planned orchestration, and finicky recording could set new standards altogether in Britain. The amount of time and thought Brian Wilson put into *Pet Sounds* was endless – and such exhaustive planning and musical mathematics might start a few lively brains ticking on this side of the Atlantic.

This week the *Melody Maker* decided to ask a cross-section of pop people their views on *Pet Sounds*.

**ERIC CLAPTON, The Cream:** All of us, Ginger, Jack and I are absolutely and completely knocked out with *Pet Sounds*. I consider it to be one of the greatest pop LPs to ever be released. It encompasses everything that's ever knocked me out, and rolled it all into one. We're all gassed by it. Brian Wilson is without doubt a pop genius.

**KEITH MOON, The Who:** I think *Pet Sounds* illustrates the way one man's mind works – that of Brian Wilson. There's nothing revolutionary in the album, I don't think. Perhaps the only revolution is in the group itself – the way they've changed with the album. They are not so much a vocal group these days. Vocals, as such, have almost disappeared with this album.

**MICHAEL D'ABO, Manfred Mann:** Basically I admire the ingenuity of the LP but it's not as revolutionary as people say. They've done a lot of unusual things, but there are one or two weak tracks. Not quite the rave people have made it out to be. It's a sort of Brian Wilson experimental combo. For me it's not the same Beach Boys. They had more appeal as a group as they were before.

**TONY RIVERS, The Castaways:** I think it's a revolution in record production. We've been playing Beach Boys songs for years, but *Pet Sounds* is a complete break, and change of style. Bruce Johnston, the sixth Beach Boy, played it to us first and we couldn't work it out. Not until we took the record home and lived with it for a while did we begin to understand it. It's revolutionary in that Brian Wilson thinks out the song and then does the arranging, recording and even the singing if the others aren't available.

Cream's Eric Clapton in London, 1966: "We're all gassed by *Pet Sounds*"

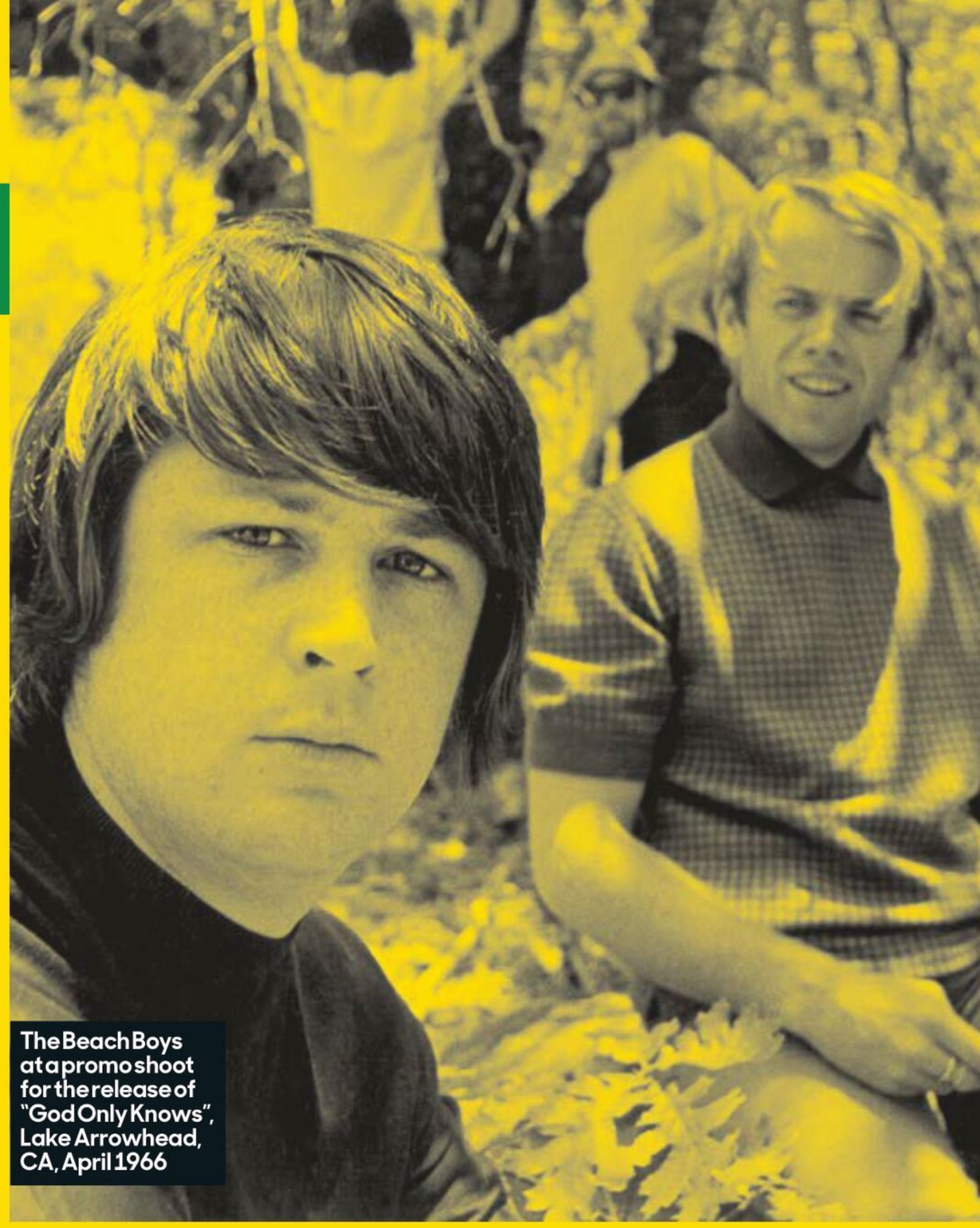
**ANDREW OLDHAM, Rolling Stones manager and publisher of Beach Boys compositions in Britain:** I think that *Pet Sounds* is the most progressive album of the year in as much as Rimsky Korsakov's 'Sherherazade' was. It is the pop equivalent of that. A complete exercise in pop technique. Personally I consider it to be a fantastic album. The lyrics are tremendous. The way Wilson has suited them to the songs is outstanding. I see pop music as a form of escapism and *Pet Sounds* is a great example of escapism.

**REG KING, The Action:** *Pet Sounds* is the most thought into, progressive LP that I've ever heard. That was until I heard The Beatles *Revolver* just this week, which pips *Pet Sounds* on the post. But The Beach Boys have, with this one album, established themselves as a capable, unique band, with an original sound. A sound that won't be surpassed for a long time.

**SPENCER DAVIS:** It's fantastic. I've just bought it and finished playing it. "God Only Knows" is the most fantastic track on the album. Brian Wilson is a great record producer. I haven't spent my time listening to The Beach Boys before, but I am a convert now and I just want to listen to this LP again and again. Thirteen of the tracks are originals – which can't be bad.

**SCOTT WALKER:** I don't think it's revolutionary. I don't even like it as much as the other Beach Boys albums.

**BARRY FANTONI:** I think *Pet Sounds* is probably one of the best produced albums out, but it suffers because of it. I managed to listen to one side of it, and I had just about a belly full. At times it was beautiful but the words were hazy which may have been unintentional – or it may have been the idea. It was rather a lazy record. Sometimes boring – not because of the way it was done, but the singing monotony. I've got *Beach Boys Today!*, which is rougher and more exciting. Actually, *Pet Sounds* reminded me of the classical composers- who I prefer - and shouldn't really compare, but it has similarity to Palestrina, and also what happened to Mozart and the painter Turner in mid-career. Their techniques became immaculate and their production fantastic and you thought, 'Who the hell managed to produce this?' That's how I feel about The Beach Boys. I preferred them when they were young and more loose and rough, as did Turner and Mozart when they got older and loosened up. I agree it's probably revolutionary but I'm not sure it is necessarily good. I'm not being anti-progressive – but I'm not convinced they're always good.



The Beach Boys at a promo shoot for the release of "God Only Knows", Lake Arrowhead, CA, April 1966

AVID REDFERN/REDFERNS, MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

We could be heroes: (*clockwise from left*) Carl and Brian Wilson, Mike Love, Bruce Johnston, Dennis Wilson, Al Jardine

# "Brian doesn't relate to time. He keeps funny hours."

**SUMMER 1967.** While Brian struggles with "six different tapes" of "Heroes And Villains", the other Beach Boys try to take care of their own business. *NME* is treated to a tour of Mike Love's sumptuous bungalow – "This place cost about three No 1 records!" – and enjoys the breakneck hospitality of Bruce Johnston, the only unmarried Beach Boy...

## NME MAY 27, 1967

NONE OF THE Beach Boys seemed very pleased about their new single when I visited their dressing room before a concert and their eventual departure to Europe. Bruce Johnston said: "It's really ridiculous. The record is in no way representative of the kind of thing we are doing now – or were doing even a year ago. This is not the music that won us the *NME* award as the World's Top Vocal Group. I've got some tapes at home of the new tracks to be on the *Smile* LP which would blow your mind. All the ideas are new and Brian is coming up with fantastic ideas all the time."

Mike Love, who had replaced his pipe with a cigar stub, puffed luxuriously and hugged his pretty, petite wife Suzanne against his kneecap – leastways that's approximately how high she seemed to stand next to him. Mike was not amused with the "Then I Kissed Her" success either.

"The record company did not even have the decency to put out one of Brian's own compositions," he said. "The reason for the hold-up with a new single has simply been that we wanted to give our public the best and the best isn't ready yet."

Smiling, walking, talking Dennis simply shook his head when I mentioned the single, and said: "Wow!" which he seemed to feel sufficient comment from him. Then he asked my assistance to balance three Coke bottles, one on top of the other. "Positive thinking," he explained. "If you think you can do it, you can do it." He did.

Carl sat silently and thoughtfully in one corner with his wife Annie, echoing the thoughts of the others. It was a shame that an old track had been issued as a single when brother Brian was working on some really important tapes in the studio back home. Without wishing to sound presumptuous, I would say that Carl is one of the few pop stars I would unquestionably believe to be a conscientious objector on religious grounds. He has previously spoken to me of his religious feelings and his sincerity concerning "love of his fellow man and abhorrence of violence or killing" struck me as very genuine.

"Naturally I'm concerned about it," said Carl softly. "But I believe people will listen to the truth. I sure hope so." He shook his head sadly and looked very unhappy.

I took the conversation back to Bruce Johnston who was full of his visit to Dolly's club, where he had met Ringo and Maureen Starr the previous night.

"Frankly I was a little embarrassed to be receiving a world's top vocal award from the *NME*," said Bruce. "I mean, to all of us there is only one No 1 and that's The Beatles. I told Ringo about this and he said that was nonsense and wished us the best of luck in your poll again next year. I thought that was really nice."

Dennis forecast: "Next year I bet anyone The Monkees win it." But he found no takers. Apart from the pseudo-single, The Beach Boys' other big disappointment was the Musician's Union ruling which prevented them augmenting their act with the extra musicians they brought along from America. "That really burned me up," said Mike. "All we were trying to do was give the British public the best possible value for money. I know this exchange thing operates but, when it means that the public must suffer, I can't see the sense of it."

Dennis zoomed over to announce triumphantly that he had succeeded in positively thinking five Coke bottles one on top of the other and there was the sound of breaking glass in his wake, to prove that even that success was ephemeral. When I left the room John Maus was talking quietly with Carl, as Carl's beautiful wife Annie – no photograph could do her colouring justice – looked sadly on. The Beach Boys could do with some luck concerning the next single and concerning Carl with his fight against getting a 'licence to kill'. The final irony of Carl's plight seemed to be summed up by a fan letter with an enclosed 'button' which bore the slogan – 'Draft Beer – Not Boys'. Hear, hear!

***KEITH ALTHAM***

**"IT'S MORE SCARY LOCKED IN AN EIGHT-FOOT WAVE THAN PLAYING TO 20,000 PEOPLE"**
BRUCE JOHNSTON

## NME JUNE 10, 1967

IT WAS A HEALTHY, sun-tanned Beach Boy who popped into the *NME* offices last week to chat about the single and the group's future recording plans. Organist, vocalist, traveller and surfer extraordinaire Bruce Johnston had just flown into London from Ibiza on his way back to America.

"I just decided to fly to Ibiza from Berlin for a few days' holiday," said Bruce, settling himself in an armchair. "We played in Germany with the Small Faces and we had a really great time, but Berlin really frightened me.

"I went into East Berlin and that's a pretty grim place but, strangely enough, away from the main streets there's real warmth."

It's not unusual for Bruce to get up and go off somewhere on his own. He is the lone Beach Boy – the one who took over when Brian Wilson left the group. The only unmarried Beach Boy – the one the others never phone.

"The others never telephone me," said Bruce. "But then I suppose we have very little in common. They're all married and have their own circle of friends and I have mine. They do ask me round to dinner occasionally, but I seldom manage to make it."

How then does Bruce spend his spare time at home? "You'll never believe this, but I actually do go surfing. I go swimming and I travel around a lot. Sometimes I travel rough and end up hitch-hiking."

Before flying back to America, Bruce had one ambition which he hoped to fulfil. He wanted to sail out to Radio London.

"I have great admiration for British commercial radio. They do a great job and they also give the public what it wants. They do no-one any harm at all and in fact they do a lot of good."

When he returns home, Bruce intends first of all to celebrate at his mother's birthday party and then to get back on his motorcycle. "Dennis is teaching me how to ride it."

How much spare time do The Beach Boys actually have, I asked him?

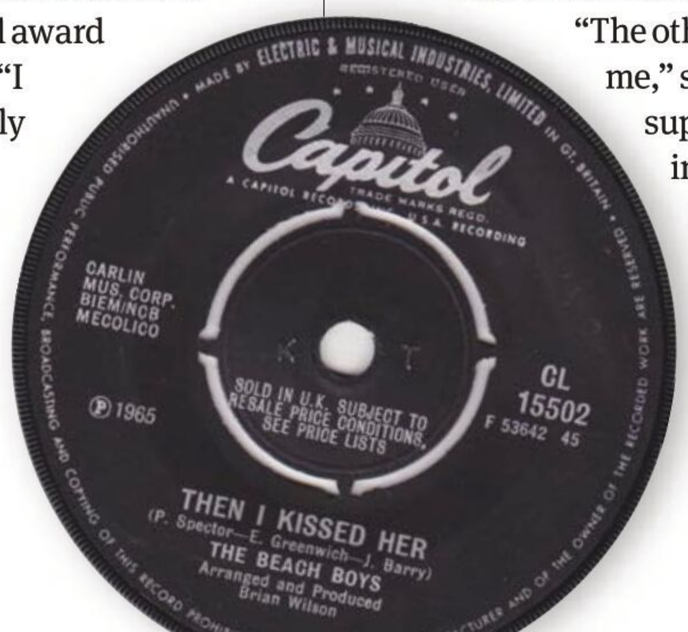
"With recording and personal appearances we generally work at least six months a year, but it depends really on how long we spend cutting a record, which varies enormously."

Before he joined The Beach Boys, Bruce worked in almost every aspect of the pop industry. He was in a group with Phil Spector; he helped with Sandy Nelson's million-selling "Teen Beat"; he worked with Jan & Dean and he wrote songs with Doris Day's son, Terry Melcher.

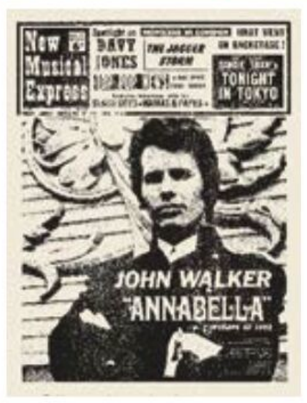
What then, I enquired, had he learned from working with The Beach Boys? He looked thoughtful for a moment and then said: "The most important thing, I think, is that my musical standards are much higher.

"The Beach Boys and, in particular, Brian Wilson never settle for anything less than what we think is perfection.

"Now, if ever I go into record production I would feel exactly the same way."




## NME JULY 8, 1967




NOT EVERYONE IS fortunate enough to be met on arrival at Los Angles by a Beach Boy with Thunderbird and two pretty blondes – but this was my pleasant lot during a recent visit to the West Coast. Bruce was honorary chauffeur, guide and benefactor during my four-day stay in LA and showed me Disneyland, the 'in' scene in Daisy's club (members include Sinatra, Garland, Streisand and all those other stars you refer to by surname!) and Mike Love's new home in Bel Air.

During the drive from the airport to my hotel, he informed me of the latest Beach Boy plans.

"There has been some talk of 'Vegetables' being our next single, but as far as Brian is concerned it will still be 'Heroes And Villains'. There are about six different tapes of this number about and now it is just a matter of selecting the right one.

CAPITOL PHOTO ARCHIVES

"We are not working during the summer anywhere and I am taking the chance to go back to UCLA to take some bass lessons – I'm the world's worst bass player technically – and some extra tuition on piano.

"I am personally returning to England for a short visit around September and I'm thinking of buying a flat in the Kensington area – are they expensive?"

Bruce is still genuinely disappointed that the group did not participate in the Monterey Pop Festival, but puts the reason down to Carl's involvement with the Draft Board and some differences of opinion over money matters.

On the second morning of my visit, I was collected by Beach Man vocalist Mike Love who arrived in his yellow, vintage MG convertible. Mike has something of a 'Love' affair with antique or English possessions. He also owns a large, white Jaguar.

We drove to his newly acquired home – he had only been in for two weeks – in Bel-Air down a drive fronted by 80-feet-high palm trees and he showed me around.

The house is a huge level bungalow with a main lounge the width of an aircraft hangar! Antiques predominate like the ancient jukebox with huge copper discs perforated with little holes which plays a tune after a penny has been placed in the machine. He also possesses a beautiful phonograph with a huge wooden bell inscribed across the front with the one word – 'Edison'. This also functions.

The garden with the inevitable blue pool boasts a lemon and tangerine tree and is filled with flowers of all descriptions. This garden looks out onto a magnificent view of the Beverly Hills and has a little country road running behind the back garden fence. "This place cost about three No 1 records!" Mike informed me. It was at Mike's house that I heard "Heroes And Villains".

Mike's particular tape ran for about six minutes and the harmonies and melodies are as intricate and exciting as one would expect. The number sounds like a combination of "Good Vibrations", "God Only Knows" and "I Just Wasn't Made For These Times". Where was the musical sorcerer who mixed this particular potion?

"Brian is in Monterey," said Mike. This was three days after the festival had finished. "He's picking up the old programmes," smiled Mike.

I got a full tour of the house with two vast bathrooms 'His' and 'Hers' (being Mike's wife Suzanne) and introduction to baby Haley.

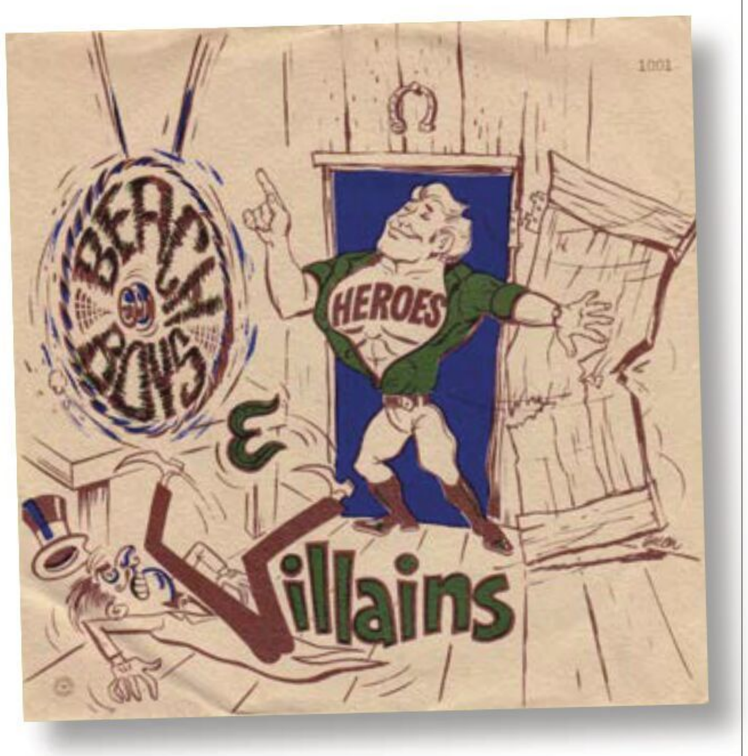
The following day embraced a trip to Disneyland, approximately an hour's drive out of Hollywood. The way Bruce drives, half an hour! Mr Johnston armed himself with a double portion of chocolate chip from the ice-cream parlour and introduced me to the delights of "The Jungle Cruise", "The Small World" and "The Pirate Ride". The latter is Bruce's particular favourite and contains huge underground caverns which you drift through on a little boat to witness working figures of pirates rucking, towns, singing, drinking and fighting battles on the high seas. They walk, talk and scare the hell out of you.

Our last outing was to the Luar, a vast restaurant which incorporates a miniature waterfall and stream which divided the restaurant in half. Mike Love was also dining there that night and Bruce became involved in a 'drink fight' with a friend somewhere on the horizon. Offensive notes and exotic drinks passed between our tables until 13 rums arrived for us and we capitulated. Late that evening we fell into Daisy's, a club for the Hollywood elite where Barbra Streisand and Bobby Darin were that evening – we also met our own Lulu over on her first visit and enjoying every minute.

**"FLOWER POWER IS GROOVY. THE TROUBLE IS, THERE ARE TOO MANY HUSTLERS"**
BRUCE JOHNSTON

"I was in here one evening while they were playing a Sinatra record about 2am, and I looked up and he was sitting over at a table on his own," said Bruce. "When your favourite LP of all time is *Only The Lonely*, you don't waste an opportunity to talk to a man like that. I went over and introduced myself – he spent 15 minutes talking to me about The Beach Boys' records and I could not get a word in to ask about his."

I left LA as I came in – driven to the airport by Bruce. He told me of his hopes to record a song of his own in the future – solo. "The only problem would be everyone would compare it with Brian's work, and with that kind of yardstick you have to be brilliant." ***KEITH ALTHAM***




## MELODY MAKER AUGUST 12, 1967

"GOOD VIBRATIONS" TOOK light years to complete – "Heroes And Villains" is The Beach Boys' new single and it took a long time, too. But there's no need to sweat about it. Fans are getting their money's worth – as they have done from the inimitable Beach Boys for many moons now. Now the group is beginning to settle down – not in the rocking-chair sense – but in the hot humid, California-dreaming surroundings that America's West Coast offers its natives.

Brian Wilson is having a good time – only "Brian doesn't relate to time. He keeps funny hours" and the rest of the guys are keeping home with their family. Except for bachelor Bruce Johnston, who "snooked" into Britain this week "to work".

"You can't relax forever. I get bored just resting," said Bruce. "I really dig to work and man we're not working again until October. That's why I've come over to England because I can do some appearances on TV and radio interviews. Also I've got a group in America who want to come over here so I'm doing some negotiation for them. I'm promoting, negotiating and vacationing."

Unlike the last time when he came to England – accompanied by Kim Fowley – for a promotional trip, Bruce was feeling a little tired and was a little less forthcoming than usual. "There isn't much to report. We haven't done anything that you don't already know about over here. 'Heroes And Villains' is out here in a few weeks and we have an album prepared. Finished? Well, it sounds finished to me. I heard it a few times before I came over. It's a quiet record – like everyone's sliding around in socks. Definitely a listen-to-me record."

The Beach Boys are criticised by some for the long gaps between releases. What does Bruce think about this?

"Well I don't think there will be any more gaps now. The gap between 'Good Vibrations' and 'Heroes' came because we were on a European tour, because we were involved in a lawsuit with our recording company in the States and because Brian decided to record 'Heroes And Villains' again when we got back from the tour.

"He scrapped a finished version of the song and wrote it again. This version is completely different from the number he wrote first. We won't be doing so much work on the road in future and more in the studio. And now everything's a lot more peaceable."

Talking of peace brought the conversation to Bruce's home in Los Angeles where he's been surfing "to bring back the 1961 Beach Boys image", he laughed. "No, surfing really is where everything started for me. It's more scary locked in an eight-foot wave – and that's not very big – than playing to 20,000 people. I guess it's because you're on your own with Mother Nature's big, big ocean right under your feet.

"But basically the conception of the Flower Power philosophy, which is healthy in California, is groovy. The trouble is, there are too many bandwagon jumpers and hustlers. But I'm glad Scott McKenzie has stayed in California and not been dragged over to England. It would have blown the whole thing out of proportion – it's better if it happens naturally.

"Music nowadays has made a lot of people think and try to straighten things out. There are a lot of kids who just don't think, but music sometimes helps them to sort things out. And you don't sort things out by shooting people.

"You can have hits and money and say

Boys will be boys: Love and Jardine during the recording of *Smile*, January '67

peaceful things and love, I know all that sounds corny, but that's kind of what's happening. I really think there's been a change. I think that young people aren't so easily led for one – they are questioning things. They are beginning to think about things that normally they wouldn't have thought about – usually because other people think about it for them.

"Brian Wilson? I think he's one of the contributors to the change because he's reaching people and he's changing things.

"The Beach Boys are a group at the very top, but they're coming from underground, too."

***NICK JONES***

**NME** AUGUST 26, 1967

WELL, THAT WAS Bruce Johnston, that was! The Beach Boys' all-purpose, all-weather, swing-winged auxiliary and unpaid publicist promoting "Heroes And Villains" in England last week. He jetted into London Airport approximately one week earlier to find publicist Roger Easterby waiting for him with a list of promotional appearances ranging from *Juke Box Jury* to the last man to appear on Radio London before the Government finally scuttled her.

At *Top Of The Pops*, I caught up with him in a state of exhaustion, with his sweater knotted high-school style about his neck, and eyes – one red, one bleary – needing matchsticks to keep them open.

"Welcome to England," quoth Bruce ironically – a reference to my recent trip to Los Angeles where I suffered and enjoyed the same lack of sleep.

"It took me 13 hours to get here," said Bruce. "I got off a plane in New York from Los Angeles which took six hours, walked round the tarmac for an hour and got back on another flight which took another six hours. It's a good way to see two movies."

Bruce had managed to plug the disc on *Disc Jockey Derby*, *Saturday Club*, *Easy Beat*, *This Is Where It's At* and *Monday Monday*.

"Believe me, one of the things this trip has taught me is the importance of radio in Britain," said Bruce. "I was very sorry to hear that Pirate Radio is being banned, but I hope 'BBC Radio 1' keeps the flag flying."

Always something of an Anglo-American, Bruce is one of those visitors who loves England, and had even acquired a mini-skirted chauffeur, Miranda.

Returning from a chat with Jimmy Savile in which he failed to get a word in edgewise, he found himself in possession of a flower-child from San Francisco – one 'Jane' – who joined us in the BBC club.

Jane had 'Love' written on her leg and Bruce obligingly wrote something else on her thigh. Then he crossed it out. Next, he went in search of food.

"That's very clever," said Bruce, pointing to a piece of veal and egg pie. "Do you grow the meat round the egg?" They don't have veal and egg pie in America! He prodded a basket of hard-boiled eggs. "Say, your English eggs have soft shells!"

Bruce has lots of little American jokes like that. We returned to our table to talk about the record.

"I'm not sure what the lyrics are all about," he admitted. "I think it's more concerned with the harmonies. The Beach Boys have really got their record scene all sorted out now – there'll be no more hang-ups.

"You can expect *Smile* to be the first LP issued on Brother Records in the next two months."

The conversation became confused as Bruce moved from eating to drinking vodka, which he tipped into his beer, and he talked of his friend Rik Gunnell – of Alan Price and Georgie Fame. Rik apparently once drove a submarine between Ireland and Germany.

"What a nice guy that Rik is," said Bruce. "He handles some really talented people. The Alan Price Set really knocks me out and they always make good records. I'd like to see them getting more recognition in America."

Suddenly a Christy Minstrel appeared at the table. "Hello," he said to Bruce. "My name is Mark Holly. You know my wife."

It transpires that Bruce did know Mrs Holly from some years ago. "In fact," he smiled politely, "She still has my tape recorder – can I have it back?"

Mark Holly was going to ring his wife at that moment but suddenly got a call to the studio.

"I'll ring her for you," smiled Bruce, obligingly rising. Mark suddenly forgot her telephone number. After the Christy Minstrel had gone Bruce said of his wife – "She was my buddy!" He has lots of little American jokes like that.

Johnnie Stewart, who produces *Top Of The Pops*, came and talked to Bruce for a while and it was generally agreed that he is one of the most friendly and agreeable producers in TV.

Bruce proposed a toast to him. Then Bruce got up and fell over – he said it must have been something in the veal and ham pie.

"Tonight is sleeping night," said Bruce. "Pill and bed. Tomorrow is *Juke Box Jury*, no pill, bed and then home in the morning."

Bruce went back to college where he is taking a musical course at UCLA and a trip to Mexico where he hopes to surf and "Paddy" – but she is another story.

***KEITH ALTHAM***

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: OCTOBER 31, 2011 (RECORDED 1966-67)

# THE SMILE SESSIONS

**"Beautiful even in its obscurity," says Leonard Bernstein. A musical revolution, incubated for 44 years.** BY TOM PINNOCK

**Critics' Verdict**

"So here it is: such stuff as dreams and bootlegs are made of. Brian Wilson's unfinished symphony was in production at the same time as Disney's *Jungle Book*. It finally emerges, with a little CGI assistance, in the same year as *Pirates Of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*. Preposterously late, *The Smile Sessions* fits into no present-day category, context or franchise. How could it? ...Wilson meanwhile, releases an album of Disney tunes this month. For him, clearly, the magic has never faded."

DAVID CAVANAGH, UNCUT, NOVEMBER, 2011

JUST TWO WEEKS before the release of *Pet Sounds* in May 1966, Brian Wilson began recording again. Usually the only Beach Boy in the studio, the songwriter, arranger and producer set to work on a project that promised to revolutionise pop, tell the story of America after European colonisation and use the studio like no group had before.

During months at Gold Star, Sunset Sound and others, Wilson immersed himself in modular recording, whereby short sections of music – what he called 'feels' – were recorded separately, and pieced together afterwards. Work began with "Good Vibrations", utilising an early form of sampling; though the vocals are different, each verse is the same musical performance, duplicated and cut into the master tape at the correct points. These methods allowed Wilson to structure songs using the studio; it was also incredibly expensive. The outlay paid off when "Good Vibrations", featuring the new electro-theremin, went to No 1 in the UK and America in October 1966. Flushed by this success, work on a full album of 'feels', dubbed 'Smile', continued at pace. In search of a lyricist, Wilson began collaborating with an eccentric young musician, Van Dyke Parks, who he'd first met in 1965. Together, Wilson and Parks mapped out a framework for an intensely positive, spiritual concept album about America, ranging from Plymouth Rock, where the Pilgrim Fathers landed in 1620, all the way to present-day LA and Hawaii. Much of their writing took place at a piano placed in a sandbox in Wilson's living room.

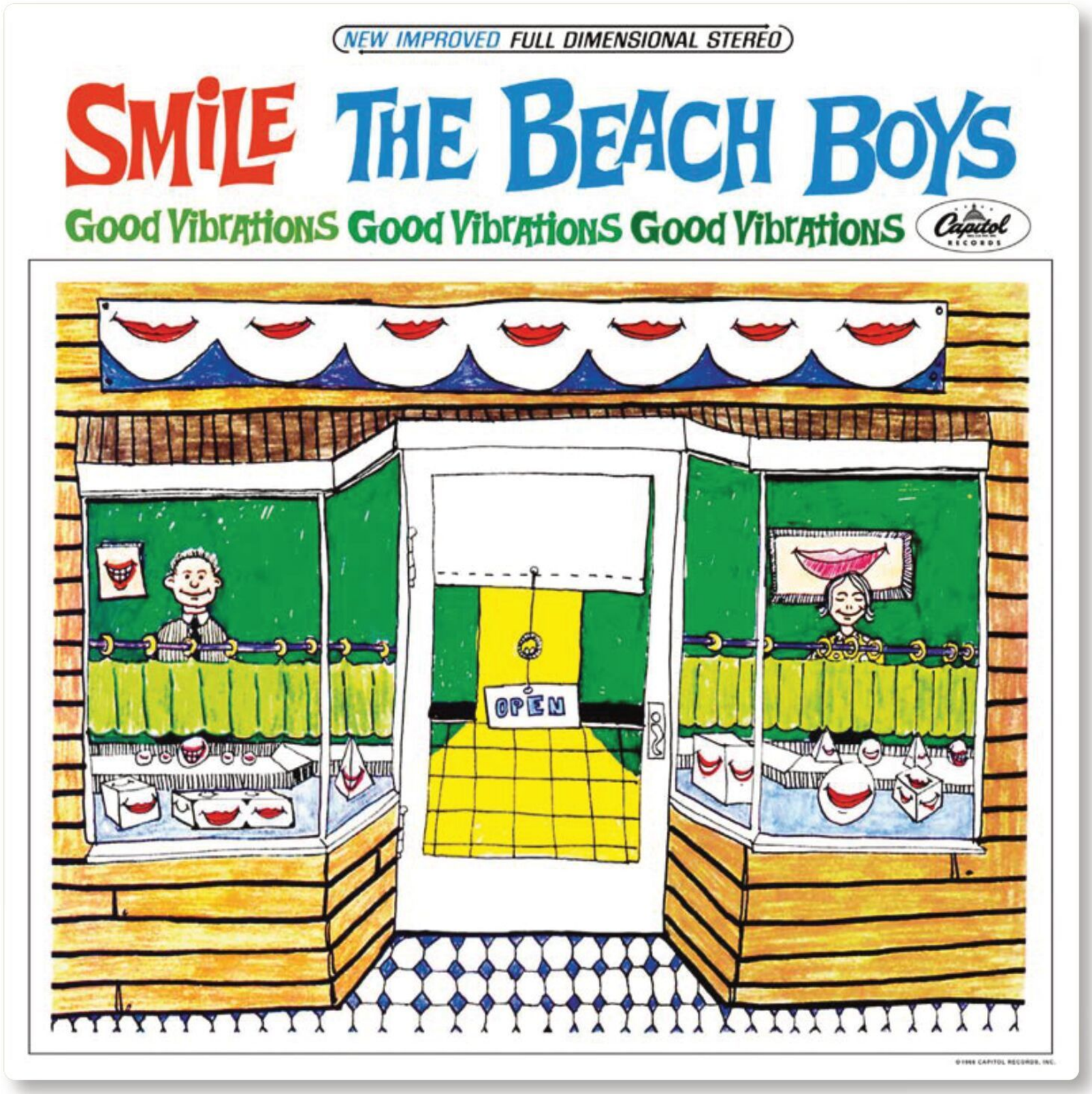
As with *Pet Sounds*, The Wrecking Crew were enlisted for recording, but this time the instrumentation was still further away from rock or pop: tack pianos evoked the sound of the Western frontier; percussion echoed the clip-clop of hooves; slide-whistles called to mind the circus; electric guitars, banjos and bouzoukis were muted to match the hollow rattle of xylophones; and flute and brass parts were often queasily arranged. With Parks' encouragement, avant-garde techniques were borrowed from *musique concrète*: tools were banged, wood was sawn, and assorted Beach Boys made animal noises, mimicked train whistles and chewed vegetables as percussion. The result was both pre-rock – more Bernstein than Berry, more George and Ira than Jan & Dean – and, in the purest sense of the term, post-rock. Either way, it was unlike anything the band or their contemporaries had attempted, which was important for a man still convinced he was in heated competition with The Beatles.

Midway through the sessions, in December 1966, Wilson performed a new song, "Surf's Up", for TV special *Inside Pop*. A strange, halting suite, it constantly shifted in key and pace, and as Wilson explained to journalist Jules Siegel during filming, dealt with Western history, the meaning of life and the search for enlightenment. While this interpretation might be hard to pick up from Parks' lyrics, his words here have an evocative lilt when sung, the soaring "*columnated ruins domino*" one of the most thrilling moments in the band's canon. As *Inside Pop*'s narrator Leonard Bernstein stated, it was "beautiful even in its obscurity".

This preview increased anticipation for *Smile*, which Wilson was now talking up as "a teenage symphony to God". Behind the scenes, though, the process was beginning to prove too much. In theory, the possibilities of modular recording were limitless, but in practice this surfeit of options was a disaster for Brian, his mental fragility exacerbated by drug use and label pressure. Suffering from auditory hallucinations, he found it increasingly difficult to place 'feels' into a coherent order.

The January 1967 release date passed without an LP, even while Capitol printed 400,000 sleeves. In March, Parks left the project, frustrated by opposition to his and Wilson's vision. Mike Love and Derek Taylor were notably sceptical, the former criticising 'meaningless' lyrics like "Cabinessence"'s "*over and over the crow cries uncover the cornfield*".

In May, *Smile* was shelved and The Beach Boys began work on the simpler *Smiley Smile*, with Wilson severely damaged by the whole experience. *Smile*'s orphaned 'feels' soon appeared on bootlegs, enabling fans to construct their own sequences, until in 2011, *The Smile Sessions* finally officially released the motherlode, the sequencing inspired by the 2004 rerecording devised by Wilson, Parks and Darian Sahanaja. There's no way to know what a 1967 *Smile* would have been like, of course, but *The Smile Sessions* certainly gives us an idea of the wonders it may have contained. Rather than a "teenage symphony", it harks back to childish concerns – the silly, charming "Vega-Tables" and "Barnyard" – or toytown pastiches – cocktail jazz on "I Wanna Be Around"




TODAY, *SMILE* CAN BE SEEN AS A JOYOUS PSYCHEDELIC CLASSIC, AN EQUAL TO *SGT PEPPER*

or Appalachian folk on "Cabinessence" – even as its imagistic lyrics and dense harmonies demonstrate a worldly sophistication.

SIDE ONE MOST obviously examines America's history, from the "*cantina*" of "Heroes And Villains", to the *Mayflower*-referencing "Do You Like Worms? (Roll Plymouth Rock)". "Surf's Up", featuring sublime lead vocals from Brian and Carl Wilson, is the resplendent climax of the second movement, built up to with the choral, mantra-like delights of "Look (Song For Children)" and "Child Is The Father Of The Man", the six Beach Boys in fine voice. The final third moves through the ominous "The Elements: Fire", and "Wind Chimes", fittingly delicate for the most part, before the humid "Love To Say Dada" (note the initials) takes the listener to more tropical climes. After a reprise of the a cappella "Our Prayer", "Good Vibrations" closes *The Smile Sessions* like the perfect curtain call to the perfect musical. It's a supremely uplifting 48 minutes, but there are moments of psychedelic strangeness too, such as the lurching strings that end the sweet "You Are My Sunshine", or the relentless jump-cuts of "Heroes And Villains". The bonus tracks present many more sections that could have made it into the episodic "Heroes...", rockier fare such as "He Gives Speeches" and extra versions or mixes of almost every *Smile* song. It's not hard to see how compiling these, the result of 80 sessions and 50 hours of tape, into a single coherent LP might have been a daunting task for one troubled man. Today, *Smile* can be seen as a joyous, strange psychedelic classic, an equal to *Sgt Pepper* or *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*. Yet it can also be viewed as the first postmodern pop LP. Ultimately, however one listens to the fruits of *Smile*, in whatever sequence, it stands as a major achievement. Back in 1967, this expensive folly was something that all involved were keen to forget.

## Trackmarks THE SMILE SESSIONS

1. Our Prayer ★★★★★
2. Gee ★★★
3. Heroes And Villains ★★★★★
4. Do You Like Worms (Roll Plymouth Rock) ★★★★
5. I'm In Great Shape ★★★
5. Barnyard ★★★
7. My Only Sunshine (The Old Master Painter/You Are My Sunshine) ★★
8. Cabin Essence ★★★★★
9. Wonderful ★★★★★
10. Look (Song For Children) ★★★★
11. Child Is Father Of The Man ★★★★
12. Surf's Up ★★★★★
13. I Wanna Be Around/Workshop ★★★
14. Vega-Tables ★★★★
15. Holidays ★★★
16. Wind Chimes ★★★★
17. The Elements: Fire (Mrs O'Leary's Cow) ★★★★
18. Love To Say Dada ★★★
19. Good Vibrations ★★★★★

**Released:** October 31, 2011
**Produced:** Brian Wilson, Mark Linett, Alan Boyd and Dennis Wolfe
**Recorded:** Gold Star, Sunset Sound, United Western, CBS Columbia Square, KHJ Radio and more, all Los Angeles
**Personnel:** Al Jardine (lead, harmony, bk vocals, sound effects), Bruce Johnston (harmony, bk vocals), Mike Love (lead, harmony, bk vocals), Brian Wilson (lead, harmony and bk vocals, piano, organ, harpsichord), Carl Wilson (lead, harmony and bk vocals, electric guitar, bass guitar, perc), Dennis Wilson (lead, harmony and bk vocals, drums, hammond organ), Charles C Berghofer (upright bass), Hal Blaine (drums, perc), Jimmy Bond, Jr (upright bass), James Burton (dobro), Jim Horn (clarinet, flute, kazoo, piccolo, slide whistle, percussion), Frank Capp (percussion), Jerry Cole (guitar), Al De Lory (piano, tack piano), Jesse Ehrlich (cello), Frank Capp (bongos, drums, glockenspiel, hi-hat, stick, tambourine, temple blocks, vibraphone), Gene Estes (perc), Carl Fortina (accordion), Sam Glenn (sax), Jim Gordon (drums, conga drums, tambourine), William Green (clarinet), James Horn (clarinet), Armand Kaproff (cello), Alfred Lustgarten (violin), Arthur Maebe (french horn), Gene Estes (Hammond B3, marimba, perc, piano, recorder, shaker, triangle, vibraphone, whistle), Carol Kaye (bass guitar, banjo), Larry Knechtel (grand piano, organ), Paul McCartney (celery on "Vega-Tables"), Jay Migliori (sax), Oliver Mitchell (trumpet), Tommy Morgan (harmonica, Jew's-harp), Van Dyke Parks (upright piano, tack piano, marimba), Bill Pitman (guitar), Ray Pohlman (bass guitar), Joseph DiFiore (viola), Don Randi (piano, harpsichord), Bill Green (clarinet, flute, piccolo, sax, whistle), Lyle Ritz (string bass), Billy Strange (guitar), Paul Tanner (electro-theremin), Don Randi (celeste, electric harpsichord, piano), Tommy Tedesco (guitar, bouzouki), Alan Weight (trumpet), Dorothy Remsen (harp)
**Highest chart position:** UK 25, US 27

THE BEACH BOYS PHOTO SPECIAL

# "Brian needed brilliance"

**The filmmaker and Beach Boys biographer DAVID LEAF talks us through some lesser-spotted gems from photographer Jasper Dailey's archive of *Smile* sessions shots. "They were truly the motherlode," hears NICK HASTED. "Back then, not only had we not heard the *Smile* sessions, we hadn't seen them..."**

IN 1966, in the wake of "Good Vibrations", Brian Wilson began work on *Smile*, an album he envisioned as "better" even than *Pet Sounds*. New collaborators including enigmatic lyricist Van Dyke Parks added to the complex, vaulting beauty of songs such as "Surf's Up". But when The Beach Boys heard the results, they disapproved. Brian shelved the incomplete sessions and began a personally troubled creative decline which many attributed to *Smile*'s dismaying collapse.

*Smile* itself became the central mythic element of Brian's genius to fans including David Leaf, whose classic 1978 biography, *God Only Knows: The Story Of Brian Wilson, The Beach Boys And The Californian Myth* – now updated in a new edition – was born from his burning obsession with rock's ultimate lost album. And not just the music.

"When I was researching my book in 1977," he recounts, "I was asking the engineers, 'Are there any photos from the *Smile* sessions?' and they'd say, 'Well, you've gotta find Jasper Dailey, who sounded like a character out of psychedelic San Francisco. When I stumbled upon him and went over to his house, he was just an ordinary guy. And he took out this box of negatives and photos, and they were truly the motherlode. Because back then, not only had we not heard the *Smile* sessions, we hadn't seen them. So for someone like me who was obsessed with the subject, seeing these pictures brought it to life in a way that I couldn't have imagined. Seeing Brian and Van Dyke Parks at work, seeing the musicians and Dennis and Carl in the studio, and seeing Brian with a fire helmet on, was really wonderful."

The *Smile* sessions have become shrouded in apocryphal incidents, such as the rash of fires which supposedly broke out in the vicinity of the studio after the sessions for "Mrs O'Leary's Cow", aka "Fire". But these photos show more joy than trauma as Brian worked.

"There is no way of knowing what it was really like," says Leaf, "because Brian is so in the moment that if you show him one of these photos, his response is how he feels now, not then. He's not retrospective in that regard. And that's part of the fun of unravelling *Smile*. As much as we've heard, it still is an eternal mystery."

**DAVID LEAF: Brian is in the control room at Gold Star, with a fire helmet on, when they were recording "Mrs O'Leary's Cow", or "Fire". What is going on behind Brian's eyes? Certainly, he doesn't look happy. He's certainly lost in thought. The journalist Jules Siegel was at that session, and he described the music as terrifying – a howl. So maybe Brian is listening to it and thinking, this is not a good vibration to put out into the world. And it's funny. In the very earliest photos of The Beach Boys in the studio, they're barefoot and that upset people at Capitol. Here in 1967, being bare-chested really goes to his lack of self-consciousness. It was, 'What do I need to do get the music right? If the music is making me feel warm, maybe I'll take my shirt off.'**

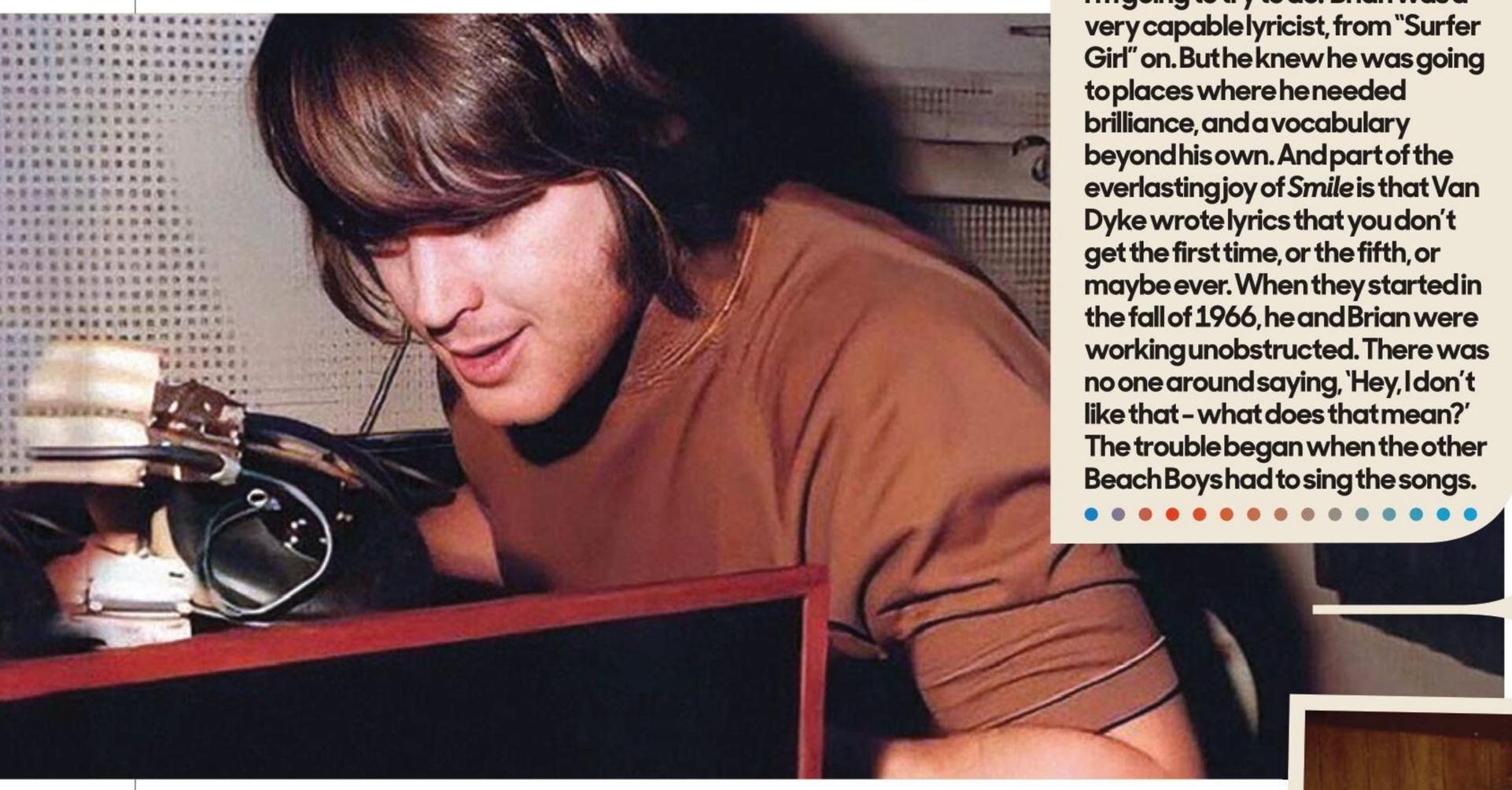
**BRIAN'S sitting next to Hal Blaine, the session drummer who probably played on more hits than anyone alive. As Hal explained it to me, Brian would play the song. Hal would listen to what his ideas were, and then talk to, say, the horn section. In this picture, you see a closeness. He was the most significant of Brian's musician relationships. They all loved him, because he was doing something that no-one else was doing. Brian really challenged them.**

PHOTO BY JASPER DAILEY/COURTESY THE DAVID LEAF ARCHIVE (COPYRIGHT DLP INC,1997, ALL RIGHTS RESERVED).

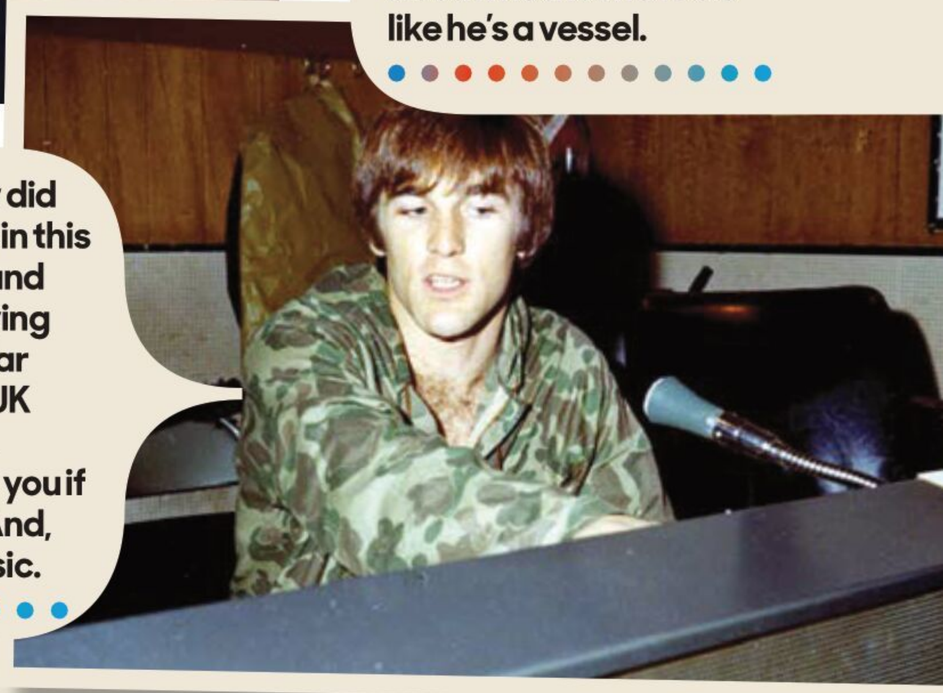
THAT'S Brian with the engineer Larry Levine at Gold Star Studio, where all of these photos were taken. It was where he cut the Beach Boys tracks, he liked the echo chambers. I love these pictures of Brian in action. And that's very much what we've got here. In those days, you weren't allowed to touch the board. And yet, he was able to. He was unstoppable. The engineers and the studio musicians were constantly astonished by what he did in the studio. In his golden era, he was the only one capable of writing the arrangement, producing the track, and he could play most of the instruments as well. We think of him at the piano, but he wrote quite accomplished bass lines which he transmitted through Carole Kaye. Brian is an impatient person, so rather than telling someone what he needed to do, in this era he showed it to them himself.

I LOVE these pictures with Van Dyke Parks. The legendary team. Van Dyke is looking up at Brian, pencil in hand, and Brian is looking at the lyric, deciding if it's working. And in the next picture, Van Dyke has got his marching orders and he's off to rework a lyric. Then there's a photo of Van Dyke holding a guitar, and Brian's plucking the string to get a certain sound. They look like the kids they are. They're 24, 25. They were out to change the world. Brian's instinctive choice of Van Dyke for *Smile* is an example of how brilliantly in the moment he was. 'I need this guy, who is a master of words, to do something no one has done before. Because that's what I'm going to try to do.' Brian was a very capable lyricist, from "Surfer Girl" on. But he knew he was going to places where he needed brilliance, and a vocabulary beyond his own. And part of the everlasting joy of *Smile* is that Van Dyke wrote lyrics that you don't get the first time, or the fifth, or maybe ever. When they started in the fall of 1966, he and Brian were working unobstructed. There was no one around saying, 'Hey, I don't like that – what does that mean?' The trouble began when the other Beach Boys had to sing the songs.

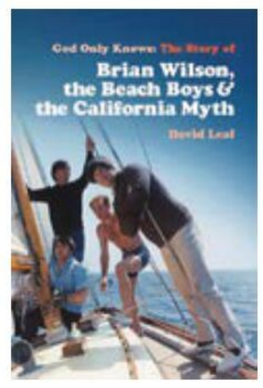
BRIAN'S at the keyboard. I love the intensity he's playing with. We think of The Beach Boys as happy-go-lucky. But Brian brought a passion and intensity, and a devotion to his work in the studio, which was his temple. Compare this to his troubled look in the "Fire" photo. He really believes that the music flows through him, and it's doing so here. He's said repeatedly that music is God's voice. One of the reasons he's so humble about it is that he feels like he's a vessel.



THERE'S Dennis Wilson at the keyboard, looking at sheet music, and asking Brian, "How did you do this?" He's at a point in his life where he's learning to make music. What we see in this picture is Dennis's curiosity. Whereas from '62, he was the drummer man, the beach boy, and the one the girls screamed for, now he's starting to grow as a musician. He's no longer playing drums on the sessions, but he's learning about what's going on. Carl and Dennis in particular really absorbed what Brian was doing. Dennis was a true believer in Brian. He once told a UK reporter, "Brian is The Beach Boys, we're his messengers." At this point in time and forever, Dennis was Brian's greatest defender. He was the one who would literally, physically fight you if you got in Brian's way. I got to know Dennis a bit. He was a wild child. But like Brian, he felt. And, as he later proved with "Forever" and *Pacific Ocean Blue*, he could put his feelings into music.



THAT'S Carl Wilson in the control room, just looking cool, plugged directly into the board. On his left is Bill Pittman, a great jazz guitarist. Carl, like Dennis, is also learning. Brian likes to have prayer sessions, and from Brian, Carl and Dennis's point of view, there was a holy nature to what they were doing. So Carl is there, he is part of it on *Smile*. Brian wanted his brothers to be there, because they had been with him in the bedroom back in Hawthorne, when he taught them the old song "Come Down, Come Down From Your Ivory Tower.' When you share a bedroom with a sibling, there's something about that, that is unbreakable. You may have arguments and disagreements, but that closeness never goes away. And Carl was always supportive of *Smile*. He understood what was going on.




*God Only Knows, The Story of Brian Wilson, the Beach Boys and the California Myth* by David Leaf is out now, published by Omnibus Press

RELEASED: SEPTEMBER 18, 1967

# SMILEY SMILE

**From the sandbox ruins of *Smile*, The Beach Boys salvage a fragile, playful – and underrated – album. Say cheese!** BY JON DALE

## Critics' Verdict

"*Smiley Smile* is a quite imaginative, daring experiment with sound, as in the wind chimes... No-one can say The Beatles are alone in way-out newness."

ALLEN EVANS, NME, NOVEMBER 11, 1967

BY MID-1967, THE Beach Boys' masterpiece-to-be, *Smile*, was a bust. Having walked away from his teenage symphony to God, Brian Wilson gathered the group in the studio in his Bel Air pad – all the better to not have to engage with the outside world – and set out to work on a replacement, of sorts, for the jettisoned album: a smaller-scale, home-recorded suite. Of course, there were practical reasons for the release of *Smiley Smile*, too: the group had contractual obligations and needed to get an album out.

Pulled together over a six-week period, from June 3 to July 14, 1967, *Smiley Smile* now feels like a minor miracle. After the building intensity of the preceding years, and the often-baroque flourishes that had found their way into Wilson's production, the denuded songs of *Smiley Smile* come across as a group learning how to breathe out. If The Beach Boys' recent non-appearance at the Monterey International Pop Music Festival had cost them the support of the counterculture – as David Anderle said, drolly, "Those candy-striped shirts just wouldn't have made it at Monterey" – the stripped-back arrangements and sandpit playfulness of *Smiley Smile* out-weirded much of what the counterculture had to offer.

The three singles that led up to the album all appear, and the richness and complexity of "Good Vibrations" and "Heroes And Villains" feel at right angles to the reductionist surrealism of songs like "Little Pad". The formal experiments of "Good Vibrations" – the chugging cello used for bass, the weaving warp of the electronic theremin, the clattering harpsichord in the middle-eight – stand out all the more for the bravery of their risk-taking, even as Wilson had argued that the song be excluded from the album; he was voted down by his bandmembers.

"Heroes And Villains", another step forward for Wilson, opens *Smiley Smile*: an exhilarating pop single, its modular construction would, in unplanned manner, end up echoing the recording process of *Smiley Smile*, if not always the songs on the album themselves. *Smiley Smile* really gets moving with "Vegetables", where the rococo arrangements of "Heroes And Villains" fall away suddenly, leaving in their place a one-note bass, pouring water, blown water bottles, crunching veggies, and a sudden leap into surprising richness at the end of the song: the coda was one of the very few elements of *Smiley Smile* lifted from the sessions for its unrealised parent.

"Fall Breaks And Back Into Winter (W Woodpecker Symphony)", a startling instrumental interlude, pivots on a fairground organ riff, blasted melodica floating above as sea-sick harmonies, and percussive clattering of unknown provenance, gather and move through in storm formations. Another revisitation of *Smile* material, "Fall Breaks" repurposes and reduces the arrangement for "Fire", one section from *Smile*'s fabled 'Elements' suite. As an echo of a storied moment in musical history, its intimate immensity gestures toward Wilson's embrace of wild musical experimentation – the writer David Toop once argued that bootlegs for *Smile* "reveal a musician completely immersed in sound", and it was no surprise when Toop included "Fall Breaks" on the compilation album that accompanied his book *Ocean Of Sound*.

It's worth keeping that rereading of Wilson's musical project, and indeed his stature as a producer, in mind as you progress through *Smiley Smile*, not least because it

doesn't explain the album's weak spots. These include the one-joke warble that was "She's Goin' Bald", or the disappointingly perfunctory "Gettin' Hungry", which had been released a few months prior as a single credited to Brian Wilson and Mike Love only. Handing the reins for The Beach Boys over to the entire group – *Smiley Smile* was the first album where production was credited to the band as a distinct, separate unit, not Wilson – may well explain the moments where quality control goes awry, a situation that repeats across the albums The Beach Boys released through the late 1960s and '70s, even as they farmed the *Smile* tapes for further offcuts.

OFTEN, though, the miniaturist, almost pointillist songs and production of *Smiley Smile* could radically turn half an idea into something completely affecting. Witness "Little Pad", which starts with the group goofing over a simple piano and voice take, detours into a graceful hymnal harmony, before two finger-clicks usher in one of the loveliest melodies Wilson wrote, over a plunking ukulele strum. All this, for a song whose lyrics – calling them 'simple' would be flattering – are about having *"a little pad in Hawaii"*. And yet, "Little Pad" is one of the sweetest songs on *Smiley Smile*, and one of the most surprisingly moving.

This modular take on songwriting would also make "Wind Chimes" and "Wonderful", the two gems from the album's second side, queerly compelling. "Wind Chimes" is particularly seductive, circling around a depthless organ drone, the group's vocals taking all kinds of detours around the melody, while strings and shells seem to whisper through the air, like miniature Aeolian harps scuffed by their exposure to the sky. "Wonderful" is no longer the graceful ballad at the heart of *Smile*, but rather, plays out as though the listener is stumbling, unbidden, into rehearsals for the love scene of a ritualistic musical – and like many of the songs from *Smiley Smile*, the party-room vocal interjections are a very consciously structured way to make the album seem happened upon.

> AS A FAILED MASTERPIECE, *SMILEY SMILE* IS OFTEN CLOSE TO GENIUS

By the time "Whistle In" shoos the album out of the room, another pop-not-pop etude, *Smiley Smile*'s fragility and intimacy has landed the listener in an entirely other place – there was certainly not much music before that was quite so loose and DIY in its perfectionism.

It's one of the albums to pull from the shelves when you're arguing, as Sean O'Hagan did to unknowing producer Joe Thomas, that Brian Wilson is "essentially a 20th-century avant-garde pop genius".

Carl Wilson's take on the album is rather more damning – soon after its release, he stated, "It was a bunt instead of a grand slam." And indeed, when considered in the context of the masterpiece it should have been, *Smiley Smile* is a failure. But as a failed masterpiece, it's often close to genius.

## Trackmarks SMILEY SMILE

1. Heroes And Villains ★★★★★
2. Vegetables ★★★
3. Fall Breaks And Back To Winter ★★★★
4. She's Goin' Bald ★★
5. Little Pad ★★★★
6. Good Vibrations ★★★★★
7. With Me Tonight ★★★
8. Wind Chimes ★★★★★
9. Gettin' Hungry ★★
10. Wonderful ★★★★
11. Whistle In ★★★

**Label:** Brother/Capitol

**Produced:** The Beach Boys
**Recorded:** February 17, 1966 to July 14, 1967 at Sunset Sound Recorders, United Western Records, CBS Columbia Square, Wally Helder Studios, Brian Wilson's home studio, Los Angeles
**Personnel:** Al Jardine, Bruce Johnston, Mike Love, Brian Wilson, Carl Wilson, Dennis Wilson (vocals, instruments)
**Highest chart position:** UK 9, US 41

RELEASED: DECEMBER 18, 1967

# WILD HONEY

**While Brian sleeps in, his R'n'B-flavoured bandmates have other bedroom matters on their minds. Boys become men.**

**BY JIM WIRTH**

## Critics' Verdict

**"Pretty sounds are back, beautiful harmonies are back and more important – melody is back. And those tracks that do not fall into any of those categories are good, solid R'n'B dance tunes."**

KEITH ALTHAM, NME DECEMBER 30, 1967

**"*Wild Honey* is slightly better than the basically disappointing *Smiley Smile*, but it seems that Brian Wilson's music has taken a vacation since *Pet Sounds*, and The Beach Boys are marking time. Nothing here to make your hair stand on end."**

MELODY MAKER, MARCH 16, 1968

BURNED OUT FOLLOWING the travails of making the unfinishable *Smile* – and underwhelmed by the reception accorded to its half-brother *Smiley Smile* – Brian Wilson took a succession of duvet days as the Summer Of Love gave way to the winter of his discontent. The other Beach Boys, though, were not about to be put on hold. As Brian Wilson 'recalled' in *Wouldn't It Be Nice*: "The guys were already working on the next album in my home studio, though they seemed to spend as much time persuading me to leave the seclusion of my bedroom as they did recording."

The stricken big brother was goaded into co-writing nine of the 11 tracks on The Beach Boys' 13th album, with bedroom matters taking an unusual prominence. Very little went on below the waistline on their earlier records, with the love on *Pet Sounds* and *Smile* either chaste or divine; *Wild Honey*, is nothing like as high-minded. *"The girl's got my heart and my love's coming down on me,"* Carl Wilson keens in sticky excelsis as the theremin wails on the indisputably thrilling title track, with little explanation required for his excitement at getting *"a taste of wild honey"*.

Never one to sully the brand, Mike Love had an innocent explanation: "Brian was doing this rhythym-and-blues-type track. I went to the kitchen to make some tea, looked up in this cupboard and there was a jar of wild honey. So I wrote this song about a guy who was obsessed with this girl and didn't care what his mom said."

Whether Mom would have approved of what The Beach Boys got up to with their partners was seemingly no longer such a great issue by this stage. With baby brother Carl turning 21 in December 1967, they were all fully grown adults by the time of *Wild Honey*'s release. Saying goodnight and staying together: no problem. *"My heart was breakin' 'til you started making me feel like a natural man,"* Brian Wilson sings, relieved to have finally reached fourth base on "Here Comes The Night" (here in its pre-disco incarnation) and he is at it again on "Darlin'", the second track off the album – after the title track – to be released as a UK single: *"Gonna love you every single night, 'cos I think you're too doggone outta sight."*

Exactly who Brian Wilson was loving every night had become a complex issue in the preceding year; he was sleeping with his wife's sister during the recording of *Smile*, but was an expectant father by the time he was working on *Wild Honey* – Marilyn Wilson would give birth to Carnie, the older of their two daughters, in April 1968. Imminent responsibility did not exactly straighten Brian Wilson up, but he was certainly yearning for less fraught pleasures on *Wild Honey*.

Joining the rush for the wilderness that followed the urban phantasmagoria of psychedelia, the clean-cut harmonies of "Country Air" sound like a bid to dispel the marijuana fug that must have hovered over Wilson's home-cum-studio. *"Get a breath of that country air,"* The Beach Boys chorus. *"Breathe the beauty of it everywhere, get a look at that clear blue sky."* A *Smile* fragment chosen to end the record, the a cappella "Mama Said" offers more wholesome wisdom: *"Eat a lot, sleep a lot, brush 'em like crazy/ Run a lot, do a lot, never be lazy."*

The sweet and innocent "I'd Love Just Once To See You" ends with a rather weak gag (*"I'd love just once to see you in the nude"*), but its most telling section catches Brian Wilson making a rare stab at straight-world domesticity and longing to turn back the clock. *"I wash the dishes and I rinse up the sink like a busy bee,"* he sings, adding wistfully. *"I wish that you were here to help me dry, when's the last time you baked me a pie? You had a way of making it come alive."*

THE slightly antiquated soul sound that The Beach Boys swipe for on "Aren't You Glad" and their cover of Stevie Wonder's near-contemporary hit I Was Made To Love Her" also hark back to more clean-cut times, before big ideas fractured Brian Wilson's thinking. "That album was Brian's R'n'B-influenced album – in his mind," Love later explained of *Wild Honey*. "It may not sound like it to a Motown executive, but that was where he was coming from on that record."

However, according too much responsibility to Brian Wilson for *Wild Honey* might be a mistake. The second successive album to credit production to the whole band, its occasional rough edges are a sure indication that their creative lead was sleeping in late as it came together. "The guys, especially Carl, took the production reins I'd relinquished," he wrote. "They were confident, even eager. Not that they were happy to have their big brother on the sidelines. But they didn't mind getting a chance to prove themselves."

Carl Wilson may indeed be the star of the show. His delivery on the title track, "Darlin'" and "I Was Made To Love Her" is arrestingly ecstatic, and he shares credit with Brian Wilson and Mike Love for "A Thing Or Two" – a dry run for 1969's "Do It Again", if you listen closely – and co-writes and sings lead on the rudimentary but robust "How She Boogalooed It", the first non-instrumental Beach Boys original to feature no contribution from Brian Wilson. The lame conceit of that song is that The Beach Boys stumble on the mother of all parties, and spend the night cutting some rug together. *"Hey, there's a stoned party dancin' with the police,"* Carl sings. *"Don't have to worry about disturbin' the peace."* Just like old times – apart from the stoned bit.

> THIS STRIVES FOR SMALLER HIGHS AND SIMPLER JOYS... IT'S SLIGHT, BUT SENSUOUS AND SUNNY, TOO

And that's *Wild Honey* in essence; the work of Beach Men rather than Beach Boys, it strives for smaller highs and simpler joys than its immediate predecessors. Talk it up to an insane degree and it's their *Music From Big Pink*; their *John Wesley Harding*. Slight, certainly, but sensuous and sunny, too. The sleeve is a detail from a stained-glass window in Brian Wilson's house; listen carefully and hear the sun shining through.

## Trackmarks WILD HONEY

1. Wild Honey ★★★★★
2. Aren't You Glad ★★★★
3. I Was Made To Love Her ★★★
4. Country Air ★★★
5. A Thing Or Two ★★★
6. Darlin' ★★★★
7. I'd Love Just Once To See You ★★★★
8. Here Comes The Night ★★★
9. Let The Wind Blow ★★★
10. How She Boogalooed It ★★★
11. Mama Says ★★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Producer:** The Beach Boys
**Recorded:** Brian Wilson's home studio, Los Angeles
**Personnel:** Al Jardine (vocals), Bruce Johnston (vocals, bass, keyboards), Mike Love (vocals), Paul Tanner (theremin), Brian Wilson (vocals, piano), Carl Wilson (vocals, guitar), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums)
**Highest chart position:** UK 7, US 24

# "The whole group are now really hustling"

The Maharishi, broadcasts to Russia, edible records to China, a "fun" R'n'B album... *Wild Honey* may be struggling in Britain, but the band's horizons keep expanding. Meanwhile, Mr Murry Wilson begins his own solo career and shares some stern opinions about his boys. "I didn't want my sons getting lazy!"

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

**MELODY MAKER** NOVEMBER 18, 1967

A FEW years ago, an American machinery manufacturer and importer made a business trip to Mexico City with his wife, leaving his three teenage sons at home. They left plenty of food in the ice-box and a $90 'emergency fund'. When they got back, they found the larder was bare – and their sons had spent the $90 on a set of drums, a string bass and some amplification equipment.

The boys, Brian, Dennis and Carl, wanted to form a rock'n'roll group. Their dad was mad at the time, but he's very, very pleased today. For the three boys' surname was Wilson and the rock group was The Beach Boys, now a multi-million-dollar pop empire.

Murry Wilson, father of the Beach Boy Wilsons, told me the story over lunch at London's Hilton Hotel last week. Murry, a middle-aged practical joker, was in London with his wife Audree on a promotional trip for his first album under his own name: *The Many Moods Of Murry Wilson*, featuring a number of songs and melodies written by Murry and other songwriters, including Beach Boy Al Jardine.

Murry has been a songwriter all his life, with minor success. Now, thanks to his trio of talented sons, he is a dollar millionaire (he was the group's manager and publishes their music) with an ambition to see his own music recorded. "It's not the money now," he said. "It's the pleasure of seeing my own music on an album and perhaps giving some young, lesser known songwriters a chance."

Murry and Audree are immensely proud of their sons, full of anecdotes about their childhood and still, although all three are grown men with their own homes, concerned about them and about their existence in a business infested with "a lot of suspicious characters".

"They all live within about four minutes of each other and see each other several times a day," said Murry. "We live about 35 miles away, but I can drive to them pretty quickly along the freeway."

When The Beach Boys first started they made a record called 'Surfin'' written by Brian and Mike Love. "It was a smash all over the States, continues Murry, "but three and a half months later, The Beach Boys, as far as the music business was concerned, were through. The boys were crestfallen. They did not want to be a one-record group but the Hollywood record companies didn't want them. They asked me to manage them, and I went off to see the companies. I went into Capitol's offices and fortunately, a man there remembered my name from a song I had written eight years before.

"Capitol took the boys on. With Capitol, the

California guys: the band hit the sand in LA, July 1967

**"ONE SIDE OF THEIR RECORDS STARTED A SURFING MUSIC TREND, THE OTHER SPARKED OFF A HOT-ROD MUSIC TREND"**

MURRY WILSON

The band pose with their platinum disc for *Best Of The Beach Boys*, December 1967

group had a string of worldwide hits and were unique in that one side of their records had started a surfing music trend while the other had sparked off a hot-rod music trend. Two trends on one record."

In the early days of the group's success, Murry had doubts about all three of his sons becoming involved deeply in the pop music business.

"In the first place, there are a lot of crooks in the music business. Then musicians have had a reputation of being lazy. I didn't want my sons getting lazy. They'd always been brought up to work hard and well. And it wanted a lot of money spent on their careers. I worked it out that it cost $7,600 to launch the group in the States. Not much compared with the million dollars I estimate was spent on The Beatles.

"After the group's second hit, I told them I would have to go back to my business, but they begged me not to. I said I would stay if they would obey me and they agreed. Really all I was doing was harnessing Brian's talent and the talent of the group. And coaching them in humility. So many groups come on strong after success. I didn't want my boys to be like that."

Murry stayed with the group – and watched his own machinery business fail. "I didn't take anything from the boys in the first year. It seemed immoral to take from your own sons. In 1963, I got 10 per cent in royalties from their concerts." Today Murry has more money than he has ever dreamed of.

He said that Brian, his eldest son, is a millionaire. "He's well on his way to his second million now. Dennis and Carl aren't millionaires yet – I think it'll take another five years for them to reach that stage.

"They own, as a group, two corporations and their net worth is between four and five million dollars."

"The three boys are extremely generous," said Murry. In fact, it seems, Dennis can be a little too generous. "One year, where the other boys invested or saved their money, Dennis spent $94,000. He spent $25,000 on a home, but the rest just went. Dennis is like that, he picks up the tab wherever he goes.

"He was so upset when, at the end of that year, I had a long talk with him. He cried when he learned how much he had wasted. Now he has learned that particular lesson.

"Brian on the other hand never has any money in his pocket. I remember when Audree flew back to Los Angeles once, he went to the airport to meet her and had to borrow 35 cents to get the car out of the parking lot."

Murry's early fears that success would spoil his sons seem to have been dispelled. "They haven't let money or success go to their heads although I have had to speak to them firmly, even sternly on occasion. They are human beings after all."

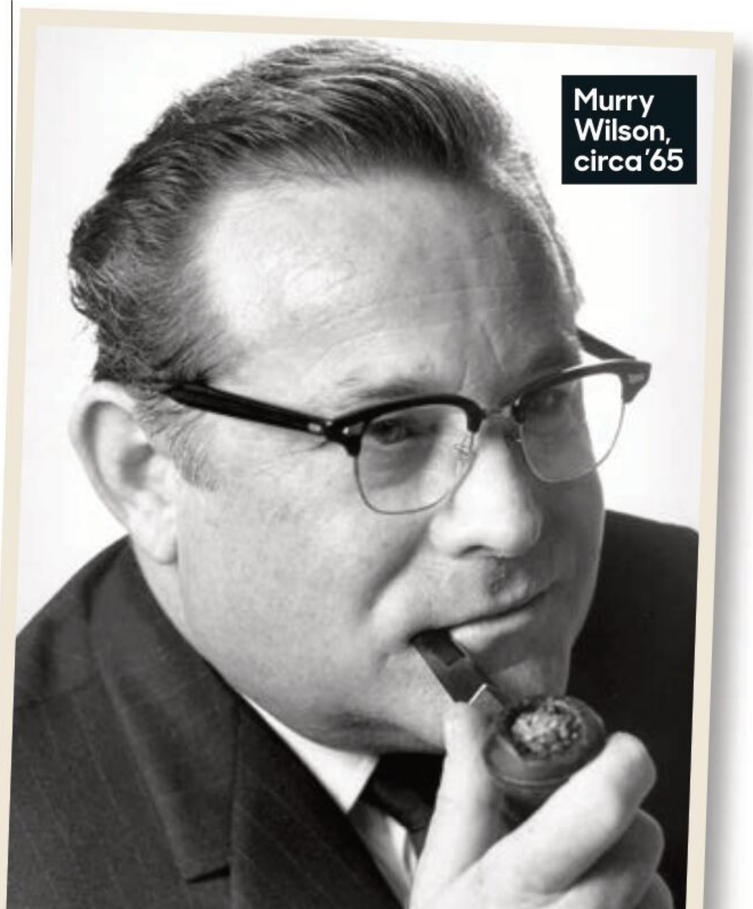
Brian Wilson's decision to quit appearing with the group to concentrate on writing and arranging was entirely his own.

"Brian is deaf in one ear. When he was doing concerts, the amplifiers had to be turned up high to make the group heard over the screams. Brian was suffering from the noise. His ears used to click for three or four hours after every concert. It was his own decision to quit appearing with the group and put a substitute in his place.

"His decision had a bad psychological effect on the group. They were crestfallen. Brian was the leader onstage and off, but they decided to go on and it was probably the best thing for them because they were leaning on him too much. Brian is happier the way things are now.

"He's very shy, timid even. He'd be afraid to appear onstage now. I think he'd be panic-stricken if he had to join the group again."

***ALAN WALSH***



Murry Wilson, circa '65

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES, MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

**MELODY MAKER** DECEMBER 23, 1967

WITH a little help from his fellow millionaires from surfdom, Bruce Johnston could probably have bought the Paris Hilton if the fancy had taken him. But instead he sat in the hotel coffee shop in an outfit consisting of a 50 bob sweatshirt, a £3 pair of Levis and four-year-old tennis shoes which he says he has worn on every tour, and ordered a hamburger and chips.

Johnston, an exuberant talker who now sports a Mexican-style moustache, said "The Beach Boys want to do more now than just make a lot of bread. That's why we said yes to the UNICEF show. One of our hang-ups has been that we haven't been doing enough public service. When we were cutting *Wild Honey* we had a break in the middle of the session to thrash out exactly what we wanted to do. We realised we'd used our popularity as a tool in reaching people.

"We now do a weekly 15-minute broadcast to Russia through the Voice Of America – and we'd really like to play in Russia, though not for any kind of fee. We just want to go as representatives of the pop scene – not as Americans. I am American, but I'm distressed at the buck-passing that's going on in the States and the ridiculous war in Vietnam. We Americans have been giving people money to make them like us and they finish up hating us even more.

"We feel maybe we can do something to improve communications and understanding. Igor, our cellist, is of Russian origin and he's teaching us to speak Russian."

The broadcasts beamed to Russia are all part of an internationalisation programme for The Beach Boys, which may well result in their spending four months of each year in Europe.

"We realise more and more how groovy the market is in Europe. Another good thing about Europe is you get treated well as artists, whereas in America no-one over 30 takes pop groups seriously. Americans over 30 are really square and still don't regard pop music as respectable."

Although Bruce Johnston contends that The Beach Boys do reign supreme as *the* pop group in the States, he admits that their last single "Wild Honey" has not exactly taken the pop world by storm. It failed to make the Top 20 in America and has been a sluggish starter in Britain.

Said Bruce: "It is not a very good record. We took a gamble and made it really simple. Still, it

has sold 450,000 in the States so it can't be that bad. Anything that sells over 300,000 is doing OK." Bruce is confident that The Beach Boys' next single, "Darlin'", written by Mike Love and Brian Wilson, will make a greater impact.

Although Brian Wilson still operates as a sort of non-playing captain for the group, Johnston says that all The Beach Boys now have a hand in production.

"When everyone hears the *Wild Honey* album they'll probably say it's not as good as *Pet Sounds*. But we tried to produce something less complicated and easy to dance to – because it really wasn't easy to dance to our other records. We have another half an album in the can which is better than *Pet Sounds*, although it's already a year old. We haven't worked on it since last April. We also have another album coming out which was recorded live at concerts in Hawaii, Michigan and Boston.

"We now have our own record company, Brother Records, and we're setting up foreign deals and finding artists. Apart from that, I'm going to make a solo record for Polydor which will be cut in the States."

Johnston flew from London to Paris to produce a record by Eddie Carter for Polydor. "When Mike Love first called me to ask me to find a replacement for Brian in the group, Eddie was the first guy I suggested. Now he has formed his own group with two New Zealand boys."

Finally I asked Bruce Johnston, as spokesman for America's No 1 group, what were his current thoughts on Britain's No 1 group.

"I didn't like *Magical Mystery Tour*. I think The Beatles should produce one album a year as good as *Sgt Pepper*. I think they could also do a big city tour of the States with the Boston Pops Orchestra or the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

"But what I'd really like to see would be John and Paul producing Elvis Presley the way he should be produced."

***MIKE HENNESSEY***

**NME** DECEMBER 30, 1967

DESPITE the fact that The Beach Boys' new single, "Wild Honey", is having a sticky time in the charts, the group is still able to generate that special kind of excitement which enables people to say "BeatlesRolling StonesBeachBoys" in the same breath.

They flew into London, recently having been "Maharished" in Paris for two days, and I met them at a reception held in their honour at the Hilton Hotel.

Dimpling Bruce Johnston was there in his battered plimsoles – living up to his reputation as the "Beach Boys' ambassador in tennis shoes" – and sporting a newly acquired moustache. He had a copy of their latest album, *Wild Honey*, for me and strange tales of the night before. He was also wearing a large size in hangovers and a pair of dark glasses.

At intervals Bruce told me: "*Smiley Smile* was an album that marked the end of an era... Brian really straightened himself out on August 25

and the whole group are now really hustling, which is great...

"Mike has this great idea about making discs for China which can be eaten after... I'm going to produce a group here that I used to play in called The New Nadir... I want to buy a Bentley – Rolls-Royces are so pretentious...

"I must get some sleep, I want to go to Traffic's reception tonight at the Speakeasy... We want to come over to tour again in February and March... Isn't it tragic about the Australian Prime Minister being lost in the surf?"

Big Mike Love was there smiling into his beard and convinced that Transcendental Meditation is one of the right directions. Said Mike: "The Maharishi's ideas are so simple and so right that I cannot begin to explain how impressed I was.

"I know he realises we will publicise his ideas but that does not deface them. He wants to spread the beliefs...

"I catch all the BBC pop programmes on my radio set in LA, so I'm up on most of what is happening... my 1930 Rolls-Royce finally arrived – in pieces. I want to speak to a man about that... we have a plan next year which could realise five million dollars."

Dennis Wilson was smiling remotely and being handsome: "*Smiley Smile* was just something we were going through at that time, connected with drugs, love and everything.

"The whole LP was recorded in Brian's house with the exception of 'Heroes And Villains', which was recorded in a swimming pool...

"*Wild Honey* is a fun album – R'n'B-based... Brian had an operation on his bad ear and is now hearing so acutely that you are going to have to stand back for our next few records – he's really into some amazing things... I'm still flying paper aeroplanes out the window!"

Carl was there being polite and courteous and gentle without trying. He invited me up to talk in his hotel suite and, being Carl, first enquired whether I was hungry and would like a meal? We settled down to some sandwiches.

He, too, is utterly convinced of the genuineness of the Maharishi, whom they met in Paris, and we talked for an hour about him.

"He's the purest, most honest human being I've ever met," said Carl. "I've only been into this meditation practice for two days, but I'm completely convinced that it is a good and constructive thing. He has succeeded in uniting the basic truths of so many of the major religions and is providing the kind of direction which the orthodox churches – constantly wrangling between themselves – have failed to do. I'm sure he has the answer – it may not be the only one, but it is an answer."

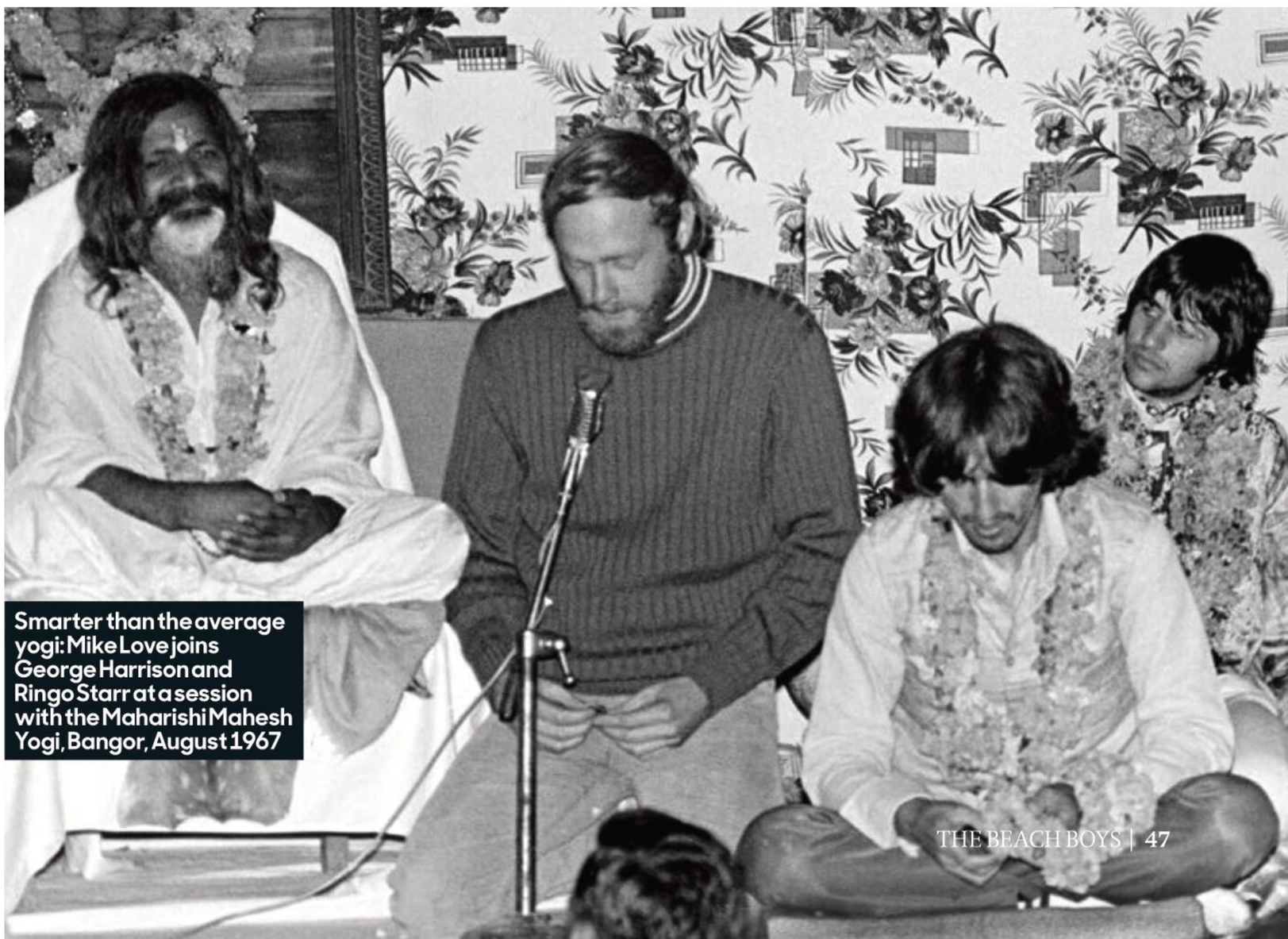
**"AMERICANS OVER 30 ARE REALLY SQUARE AND STILL DON'T REGARD POP MUSIC AS RESPECTABLE"**
BRUCE JOHNSTON

And at intervals... "Lulu's 'To Sir With Love' was a gigantic record but I preferred 'The Boat That I Row' which was on the flip... I've been with The Who since 'I Can't Explain' – they have real talent and are breaking big now in the US...

"The Small Faces' 'Itchycoo Park' is going well and I like that, too... Bill Cosby is the person really laying down humour in the US... *Wild Honey* is really a fun album."

Some day I may catch Carl saying something unkind, but I hope not. ***KEITH ALTHAM***

CUMMINGS ARCHIVES/REDFERNS



Smarter than the average yogi: Mike Love joins George Harrison and Ringo Starr at a session with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Bangor, August 1967

RELEASED: JUNE 24, 1968

# FRIENDS

**In the wake of the Maharishi, a hazy calm descends. A "feather floating through a wall of noise," reckons Bruce Johnston.** BY JON DALE

## Critics' Verdict

"The wordless 'Passing By', by Brian Wilson, in which voices are used as instruments to merge with real instruments, is quite delightful."
ALLEN EVANS, NME, SEPTEMBER 14, 1968

"With this descent from *Pet Sounds*, The Beach Boys have emphasised that they are still a creative power that have learned the lesson that to be good, even 'significant', it doesn't have to be complicated."
MELODY MAKER, SEPTEMBER 21, 1968

IN RETROSPECT, it seems blindingly obvious that The Beach Boys would hook up with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Many of Brian Wilson's greatest songs had spiritual quest and questioning at their heart; here, after all, was someone who, at his most devoted, treated music as a direct route to the divine. But The Beach Boys were also highly reactive figures – remember the sparring, via albums, between Wilson and The Beatles – and if the Maharishi was a hit with The Beatles and Donovan, well, sign us up. Mike Love even followed Donovan and The Beatles back to Rishikesh, India to study with the Maharishi, and came back flooded with 'spiritual knowledge' – which is not quite the same as wisdom.

Transcendental Meditation was the Maharishi's speciality, a gilded naming for what was basically meditation via the repetition of a mantra, twice a day, for 20 minutes. Given the counterculture's focus on all things slightly dippy, Transcendental Meditation was a no-brainer, catching the attention of the hippie crowd and their leaders. The Beatles, of course, eventually lost faith in the Maharishi, though retained a degree of interest in meditation. Mike Love, fully seduced by the practice, came back from the Transcendental Meditation retreat to find his group in Brian Wilson's home studio, already at work on *Friends*.

On its release, *Friends* was received largely with little interest, standing as confirmation of The Beach Boys' fall from grace. Over time, though, and like many of the albums from the group's post-*Pet Sounds* run across the late '60s and through much of the '70s, it has come to be thought of as quietly experimental, full of light, breathy songs. While it doesn't take big risks, like *Pet Sounds* and the aborted *Smile* sessions, nor proffer new forms of music, like some of *Smiley Smile*, it consolidates the group's propensity for melody in calm, and for slyly ingenious arrangements. There is some exquisite music on *Friends*, and as with loosely contemporaneous albums such as *20/20* and *Surf's Up*, part of the magic, listening back, is stumbling across the songs of genius that genuinely surprise the unsuspecting listener: certainly, on my first few listens to *Friends*, way back when, songs like "Diamond Head" and "Be Still" stood out as unexpected glimpses of something truly other.

Brian Wilson himself looks back on the album fondly – in his 1991 autobiography, he claimed that *Friends* was his favourite Beach Boys record. Bruce Johnston's reflections on the album, in contrast, focus on its seeming lightness – he describes it as "full of air", and placing it in its historical context, remembers that: "The whole country had discovered drugs, discovered words, discovered Marshall amplifiers, and here comes this feather floating through a wall of noise." Certainly, parts of *Friends* do seem out of time, but with the benefit of nearly half a century's hindsight, this is due to their aesthetic weightlessness – the best of these songs hover and drift, timelessly, into half-lit focus, ether from the speakers.

A "feather floating through a wall of noise" – there aren't many better descriptions for *Friends*' opener, "Meant For You", one of Mike Love's lead vocal turns. It's a beautifully slight thing, gentle and churchy, Love's voice surprisingly tender and heartfelt, its unassuming nature setting the listener up in just the right receptive mood for *Friends*' breezy ease. (A longer, alternate version of the song appeared on *Made In California (1962–2012);* it's similarly lovely, though the shy mystery of the LP version feels definitive.) "Friends" itself follows, a gorgeous reflection on the nature of friendship in the post-teen age: lyrics like "*I talked your folks out of making you cut off your hair*" are

charming, almost childlike in their understanding of the interpersonal pact. We're a long way, here, from "*Columnated ruins domino*" – and the better for it, given the sea change the music of The Beach Boys undertook in the intervening years. "Friends" was released as the single from the album, with Brian Wilson convinced that the song would help keep the 3/4 time of the waltz alive.

If much of the rest of *Friends* passes by in a haze, it's not for lack of quality. The songs that constitute the bulk of the album are uniformly gorgeous – Side One's run of "Wake The World", "Be Here In The Mornin'" and "When A Man Needs A Woman" is solid, and ending the side with the delightful driftwood instrumental of "Passing By" sets up Side Two's more elevated dimensions. There are parts of this that don't quite work, of course: "Transcendental Meditation", the song, still scans as corny and under-thought; "Anna Lee, The Healer", Mike Love's reflection on his time in Rishikesh, inches close to caricature.

THE most significant leap forward in the group constitution on *Friends*, though, is the sudden reveal of Dennis Wilson as a songwriter of depth. "Little Bird", stretched with an uncredited bridge from Brian, is stately and blissed out, Dennis's descending melody twisting through like the roots of the "*tree in my own backyard*" he hymns in this song of simple pleasures. "Be Still" has Dennis fragile and alone, backed only by a humming organ, singing with rare grace and gentility – "*You know, you know you are/Be still and know you are/Your life is meant for joy/It's all so deep within*". For all his unpredictability, Dennis's songs here hint at someone metaphysically grounded, with an understanding of the complexities of life that he would develop through songs on subsequent albums, fully realised on his lone solo masterpiece, *Pacific Ocean Blue*.

> THIS IS A GROUP WILDLY OUT OF STEP WITH THE TIMES, BUSY DOING THEIR THING

Brian's "Busy Doin' Nothin'", a sweet bossa nova ode to, well, doing nothing very much, leads into the gossamer tiki melancholy of "Diamond Head", the album's other instrumental, and one which waves back to the minimalist experimentalism of *Smiley Smile*. It's yet another indication of a group wildly out of step with the times, busy doing their own thing. The times responded in kind – the first tour after the recording of the album, lost in the socio-political ruptures of the times (Dr Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated just as the tour started), bombed out; a second tour, just prior to its release, with Maharishi on board at Love's insistence, was similarly poorly attended. Yet as a meeting place of the group's burgeoning spiritualism, combined with the emergence of what Peter Carlin has described as a Walden-esque "awe for the natural world", *Friends* is indeed, in its own weird way, a transcendental outing: it just depends which transcendentalism you're looking for.

## Trackmarks FRIENDS

1. Meant For You ★★★★
2. Friends ★★★★★
3. Wake The World ★★★
4. Be Here In The Mornin' ★★★
5. When A Man Needs A Woman ★★★
6. Passing By ★★★★
7. Anna Lee, The Healer ★★★
8. Little Bird ★★★★
9. Be Still ★★★★★
10. Busy Doin' Nothin' ★★★★
11. Diamond Head ★★★★
12. Transcendental Meditation ★★★

**Label:** Capitol Records
**Produced:** The Beach Boys
**Recorded:** February to April 1968, Brian Wilson's home studio and ID Sound, LA
**Personnel:** Al Jardine (vocals), Bruce Johnston (vocals), Mike Love (vocals), Brian Wilson (vocals, organ), Carl Wilson (vocals, guitar), Dennis Wilson (vocals)
**Additional musicians:** Jim Gordon (drums), unknown (bass, bass harmonica, drums, glockenspiel, harmonica, percussion, tuba)
**Highest chart position:** UK 13, US 126

# "Everyone else was going back to basics..."

The surf sound is back, as "Do It Again" provides The Beach Boys with their biggest hit in years. There is discontent within the band, though, and a defensiveness about the whole Maharishi business. Also: a possible live return for Brian; a "cautious Apple"; a date with Elvis; and the logistical difficulties of importing an entire English pub.



Five go mad in the studio: group portrait, January 1, 1968

## NME MARCH 23, 1968

THE BEACH BOYS meet Elvis! The Beach Boys tour with the London Philharmonic Orchestra? Bruce Johnston sings Lennon and McCartney! The Beach Boys to do rock'n'roll with Gene Vincent? Beach Boys concerts to raise half a million dollars for the Guru's Foundation? You can take your choice from those subjects, which were all part of a 40-minute transatlantic phone call from Bruce Johnston.

Fact is that The Beach Boys did meet Elvis recently, and Bruce happily launched into an account of their meeting.

"We just happened to be in the same recording studios as Elvis," said Bruce. "I was standing around in the corridor when this guy came up and asked if we would like to meet Elvis. He was going to bring him into our session and introduce him, but Brian got very hung up when I told him. 'Don't bring him in here or I'll scream,' he said.

"Eventually Al and I got up enough courage to go and walk into his studio. He is very polite but not so cool that it prevents you from making conversation. He had a 50-piece orchestra in the studio and was cutting a number for a new movie.

"We started to talk about touring and he admitted that he missed making personal appearances. He told us how in 1955 he used to hire a whole train for his concerts and how a Cadillac once caught fire on him and he just got out in time. He used to be very concerned over the security angle and was worried over other people getting hurt at his concerts as he was himself.

"We told him how some of our tours had been arranged and we convinced him that things are a bit slicker now.

"Elvis thought it would be a great idea if we could get together with The Beatles, Bill Haley, Ravi Shankar and ourselves to do a mammoth pop TV show as a spectacular for pop music.

"It was a hell of a fine idea and as was pointed out – no-one thought the Monterey Festival could be organised until someone got things together and did it."

The possibility of The Beach Boys' return to England this summer was discussed and Bruce affirmed that all the group wanted to come.

"We had one scheme where we were going to do some concerts with the London Philharmonic Orchestra," said Bruce, "but then we discovered that they are booked up for about three years in advance.

"The other plan being discussed is another European trip – it would be nice if we could include the pop festival in Majorca but then no one has asked us. I'd like to go back to Ibiza, which is like the next island along."

Included in The Beach Boys' recording plans are Bruce's own solo album, which features him singing the Lennon & McCartney composition "With A Little Help From My Friends". He played me his interpretation of this on the piano over the phone – believe it or not he has made a very listenable waltz out of it!

"We're also releasing an instrumental album of our biggest hits so that people can sing and play along with them," said Bruce.

The Beach Boys begin another tour of the United States in April when one of the attractions will be what Bruce called "a party for a few friends" – some 15,000 fans who will be invited to a hall in Dallas.

"Dallas is the area where we are most popular," explained Bruce. "We want to say a special thank you to all the fans there. We almost had Brian convinced that he should come out with us on this tour and appear himself, but he backed out yesterday. He needs more time for the recording studios."

How has the mythical Mr Wilson B reacted to transcendental meditation?

"He's not convinced," said Bruce, who admitted that he was. "Brian thinks it's a bandwagon that everyone is leaping upon because The Beatles made the going. I do believe in the practical elements of Transcendental Meditation, but I don't want to talk about it.

"We intend to do a tour with the Maharishi on one half of the show and us doing the other. That would gross him about half a million dollars for his centre in India."

Bruce is not too pleased with The Monkees' Organisation at present!

"Someone must have given them my home address for a joke," he said. "They printed it in The Monkees' official magazine and said I was a fan. I'm still digging myself out of the mail I've received on that one."

Other business at the Johnston residence includes a pipe-dream of Bruce's to import a British pub to Beverly Hills.

"I really got to think about it," said Bruce. "I mean, really – section by section, a genuine British pub out here would be a storm. The only trouble is that I would have to get some genuine English people to fill it. I really miss going into a pub."

For those who collect useless pieces of information: Bruce is having his big toenail removed shortly – due to damage on last year's English tour, when a group of fans stood on it – he has acquired four TV sets including a colour job which Brian gave him for Christmas. He is also drinking too much wine. ***KEITH ALTHAM***

## MELODY MAKER JUNE 1, 1968

AN UNEXPECTED BONUS came out of the collapse of The Beach Boys' abortive tour with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. After the Indian mystic split the trek, amid mutters of disenchantment reverberating from John, Paul, George and Ringo in London, The Beach Boys found themselves with some unexpected time on their hands.

"We are spending it in the recording studios, working on a new single and some album tracks," said Carl Wilson on the transatlantic telephone from Beverly Hills last week.

One of the conditions of being put in touch with the group was a complete embargo on questions about the Maharishi and the tour, but Carl volunteered the information that the tour had ended and that we should "expect Maharishi in London very soon".

"We cancelled all the dates on the tour eventually," he went on, with Mike Love joining the conversation on an extension phone. "It gives us time to get together with Brian at his house to work on some recording ideas."

"We haven't any special ideas about what we'll be doing, but we have our first session tonight and hope that we'll have time for an album as well as the single we're planning."

**"WE'VE HAD AN OFFER TO TOUR SOUTH AFRICA. SEGREGRATION? WE DON'T WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN THAT SCENE"**
CARL WILSON

Their new British single, "Friends", hit the *Melody Maker*'s Pop 30 at No 28, but has failed to make progress.

Carl told me the record was made about two months ago.

"We just got together at Brian's house in the Hollywood hills and kicked around some ideas. We recorded most of it there and added the vocals and lyrics later in the studios."

We will not be seeing the group in Britain now until the autumn, as reported in last week's *MM*.

"We had originally planned to come earlier – around June or July – but we were informed this was a bad time so it now looks like the autumn. We would like to do another British tour, but not the same as we've done before."

They are thinking about a major concert in London to kick off the tour (possibly at the Albert Hall) and then selected dates in major cities throughout the country. They stressed they wanted to do something different from the traditional package tour round the country, and revealed they were working on ideas for the trip at the moment.

"The tour will also probably take in several Continental countries, too. We have had offers to appear in countries behind the Iron Curtain, which we are considering," said Mike. In all, the group expect to be in Europe between four and five weeks.

I asked Mike if his ideas for pop co-operation between the group and the leaders of pop in

EARL LEAF/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

(Inner) peace and Love: at the International Academy of Meditation, Chaurashi Kutia ashram, India, March 18, 1968

Great Britain – The Beatles and Donovan – had come any nearer to fruition.

"Not really. We have not had time to get anything together since I was in London. At the moment, we cannot go on with the plans, but I am, in fact, planning to call Donovan's manager very soon to start discussions."

MIKE REPORTED THAT British groups like the Cream and Jimi Hendrix were doing well on America's West Coast at present. But there was no sign in the States of any revival of rock music.

"I'd read about rock'n'roll coming back in Britain, but we can't see it happening here," he reported. "But we don't believe that the music scene is stagnating. I believe that pretty soon there's going to be an injection of new life into pop music. There's going to be a whole lot of music happening soon."

Carl said that this year The Beach Boys would be off on their travels again to several new countries, in addition to Eastern and Western Europe.

"We have had an offer to tour South Africa, which we are considering.

"Would we have to play to segregated audiences? We've no way of knowing and anyway, we don't want to get involved in that scene.

"As far as segregation is concerned, we're apolitical." ***ALAN WALSH***

## MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 7, 1968

SUNSHINE SURFING MUSIC is back in the Top 10 – again peddled merrily by the West Coast wizards of electronic recorded music, The Beach Boys. Their new single, "Do It Again", has brought the tang of the surf and the gaiety of a sunny California beach back into the *MM* Pop 30.

"Yes, it has got the old Beach Boys surfing sound, I suppose," said Beach Boy brother Carl Wilson to the *MM* this week. "It's back to that surfing idea, with the voice harmony and simple, direct melody and lyrics. But we didn't plan the record as a return to the surf or anything. We just did it one day around a piano in the studios.

"Brian (Wilson) just had the idea and played it over to us. We improvised on that and recorded it very quickly, in about five minutes. It's certainly not an old track of ours: in fact, it was recorded only three weeks before it was released. We just liked how it turned out and decided to release it."

The Beach Boys are getting into a variety of different types of music in their recordings at the moment. "There are a lot of different things happening. We're letting them happen and seeing what comes out. For instance, we've just done a very soft thing, like a waltz, which is very pretty."

They are more together these days, said Carl. At one time, Brian was the fountainhead of ideas and creativity, but today the other four boys and Brian's deputy Bruce Johnston contribute far more to their recorded sound than ever before.

"It's more a group effort; we are all getting ideas and putting them forward. For example, Dennis is writing some fine songs at the moment. But I wouldn't say The Beach Boys had any particular musical direction. As I say, we are letting things happen, recording ideas and seeing how they develop. We are currently working on a new album and I think when it's released in Britain, there'll be some new ideas for the Beach Boys fans there to listen to."

The group are open to influences around them. They are aware of groups like Jefferson Airplane and The Doors, as well as the increasing interest being taken in the blues. "We all buy and listen to a lot of albums even though we don't get to see many groups live. But we are aware: we know for example that a blues group called Canned Heat is happening. I hear they are really a tremendous group in person, too."

Carl and his cohorts would deny that a new Beach Boys sound is emerging to dominate the group, but they will be doing a lot of new material when they visit Europe again later this year. The tour, which will probably take in six or seven dates in Britain, is scheduled for late November or early December and Carl said: "We'll be doing the things The Beach Boys have become associated with, but there'll also be a lot of newer things on show that we hope people will like."

One of the things they will be doing during their European junket will be filming. "We are to make a film. Not a feature film, but a crew will be with us filming us and we'll be doing some things in London. I don't know at this stage exactly what we'll be doing with the film; maybe it'll be used as promotion material. We'll have to wait and see how it turns out."

It could be used as the basis for a Beach Boys TV special or even cinema screen short, however, and is a project which Carl is interested in.

The Beach Boys of course were involved with the Maharishi, the mystic now abandoned by The Beatles, earlier this summer. This, reflects Carl, was probably a mistake.

"I don't think we should have got involved with him," said Carl. "It was a mistake."

But, he stressed, that didn't mean the group eschewed meditation.

"We still meditate, we haven't been disillusioned by that. It gives an immediate relief of tension, but we didn't realise the long-term implications. You have to stay with it for a long time before you really get the benefit of meditation to the full." ***ALAN WALSH***




## NME SEPTEMBER 7, 1968

MR JOHNSTON OF Coldwater Canyon, Hollywood, rang me last Friday at home after my two unsuccessful attempts to reach Mr Johnston.

He may be better known to some of you as Bruce of The Beach Boys and straight from his long run across America with The Box Tops and a comedy act called The Tickle Brothers, he was exhausted but happy!

"We broke every attendance record in the book," Bruce told me. "I was beginning to think that, with the Cream thing and Jimi Hendrix breaking so big out here, we were dying. But we got unbelievable receptions. The 'Underground' is now so big out here that it is above ground, if you see what I mean, but we still have an enormous following for our kind of music, thanks to our loyal fans!"

I enquired about his reaction to the abortive appearances of the group with the late, lamented Maharishi. Had Mike Love thrown in his hand along with Messrs Beatles when they 'excommunicated' the Yogi?

"Er, yeah?" Bruce started undeterminably. He restarted: "Well, I think that everyone should do a tour like that. Everyone should have the experience of losing three or four hundred thousand dollars – it's real funky! Now we're spending all our time making up the money we lost. No, Mike lost no faith in the Maharishi and he still meditates – none of us have lost faith in the method."

Among the rumours circulating about the Beach Boys tour here later this year have been those that they will record a live album at the London Palladium (as carried exclusively on *NME* newspaper some weeks ago) and that on this



ROLLS PRESS/POPPERFOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES/GETTY IMAGE

visit Brian Wilson will accompany them for recording purposes.

"We are definitely recording a live album at the Palladium and we have another surprise up our sleeve for that appearance," said Bruce. "I can't say any more about that just in case it doesn't come off. I think it very unlikely that Brian will be coming with us – at present, he has even trouble getting out of his house!"

At this point I admitted that, as an ardent supporter of The Beach Boys' music and in particular the original progressive work of Brian Wilson, I was personally disappointed with "Do It Again", despite its No 2 position in the *NME* chart this week.

"I don't like it either," admitted Bruce. "I don't think that the group were entirely happy with it. But everyone else was going back to basics, so I suppose it was inevitable that we should.

"One thing you can be sure is that the next single will not be another surfing record. Brian has a number of magical musical things up his sleeves... It will be very danceable and we will almost certainly have it to promote when we come over for the British tour."

The Beach Boys' other plans include a considerable amount of time and effort to be put into their own organisation. They have their own building in Hollywood and Bruce describes their company as a "cautious Apple!". The tenants of Beach Boys Inc are concerned with promoting the group's own activities and producing and promoting new talent.

"Then there is, of course, our recording studios," said Bruce. "It's called 'Studio Three' and I think Jagger used it quite recently. A number of top-name groups record there, but not many of them are aware that we own it."

Like a great many other Americans, Bruce is not terribly proud of what has been happening in Chicago recently with the police wading into the demonstrators with batons and clubs.

"There is no use the general public hiding from the unpleasant truths," said Bruce. "It's brought right into homes – last night I had the pleasant spectacle of... a black soldier beating the living daylights out of a white guy on my colour TV."

Finally, Bruce mentioned that he had recently been to see Eric Burdon and The Animals at the Whisky A Go Go. As there have been at least two reports that American correspondents (including our Ann Moses) have been less than underwhelmed by Eric's latest performances, I asked Bruce what he felt about them.

"I thought what he had to say was quite valid and that the anti-war message was quite obvious. Some have said that what he has been doing has nothing to do with music. I disagree. I think it has everything to do with music. It's life."

***KEITH ALTHAM***

## MELODY MAKER DECEMBER 7, 1968

THE BEACH BOYS were in remarkably good humour considering their urgent need for sleep when they met the press in London on Friday.

Carl Wilson, Dennis Wilson, Mike Love, Al Jardine and Bruce Johnston had done two concerts in Boston before flying to Britain. Their plane, naturally, was delayed by fog and they had hardly had time to unpack before being thrown to the newshounds.

The group is here for 11 days to play concerts and generally promote their new single, "Bluebirds Over The Mountain". Before leaving the States, they had completed a new album.

"It's called *Twenty Twenty* because it's our 20th album – if you count all of those 'Best Of The Beach Boys' and 'Worst Of The Beach Boys' things," Mike Love told me. "It will be something a bit different for us. For a start it is in stereo. The rest of our albums have been in mono with that phony stereo bit – this was because Brian Wilson only hears in mono, because he is deaf in one ear.

"Anyway, Carl helped to coordinate this album and we all took much more interest than usual in coming up with production ideas. All the guys were writing now. We did a traditional song that Al worked on. Bruce did 'The Nearest Faraway Place', which is a really pretty instrumental with piano and plenty of strings. Dennis wrote three songs. I just did the parts for 'Do It Again'."

**"MANY PEOPLE THINK 'GOOD VIBRATIONS' WAS THE BEST THING WE HAVE DONE. THEY MAY BE RIGHT"**
MIKE LOVE

Mike said the group would be featuring a couple of things from the album on tour. "We will be doing 'Bluebirds Over The Mountain', which is the new single taken from the album, and a thing called 'All I Want To Do' which Dennis wrote and I sing on – it's got some screaming and stuff on it."

I asked whether The Beach Boys weren't getting tired of touring.

"We've certainly been doing a lot of touring in the States and we are planning to cut it down," agreed Mike. "But we will keep up the international side. Travelling doesn't bother me – we all enjoy it pretty much. And we really like coming to Britain – who wouldn't?"

Most of The Beach Boys' discs start out in a studio in Carl's house.

"He has all the instruments, all the machines and everything," said Mike.

"Actually, we have now bought a record studio in Hollywood and we intend to record other groups as well. We are trying to buy a record label... We are going into it very seriously."

Does Mike plan to move into the production side?

"No," he told me. "I'm more interested in writing and singing, and, anyway, four of the guys are all better producers than I am. One drawback is that I don't play any instruments and I think that helps when you are producing.

"I don't exactly plan ahead much. When things finish for the group I may do some writing, or carry on singing, or do some acting – I'd like to act, but that is a thing I'd have to go away by myself and get it all together."

Mike agreed that the group's recent hit, "Do It Again", was a deliberate attempt to recreate their original surfing sound.

"Last May I was on a beach and it inspired me to write the song," he told me. "I talked to Brian about it and in half an hour we'd written the whole song."

Of all their many hits, which is The Beach Boys' biggest seller?

"'Good Vibrations', says Mike. "It was the most successful... and also the most respected. A lot of people think it was the best thing we have done musically, and they may be right."

There was a good deal of publicity surrounding The Beach Boys' involvement with the Maharishi and subsequent reports that they were as disenchanted as The Beatles. Mike denied the disenchantment.

"I certainly want to go to India again and so do Carl and Dennis," he said. "It would be wrong to say that the Maharishi did us no good."

In pop terms, The Beach Boys have been together for a very long time.

"We are together so much and been together so long it's like second nature sticking together," explained Mike. "I suppose it is surprising how little friction there is between us. We just seem to get on well." ***BOB DAWBARN***

Walking by the Thames, December 1, 1968

SUSIE MACDONALD/REDFERNS

RELEASED: FEBRUARY 10, 1969

# 20/20

## *Surfin'* revivals, *Smile* leftovers, the hand of Charles Manson and the coital grunts of Dennis: the deep weirdness of *20/20*.

**BY JASON ANDERSON**

### Critics' Verdict

**"The title refers to 20/20 vision, the sleeve has a front picture of The Beach Boys in focus, and out of focus on the back side, with a sight chart inside."**

ALLEN EVANS, NME, MARCH 22, 1969

**"At least they have returned to good melodies and pop simplicity with a minimum of freaking out, a policy shown to be valid by the success of two tracks 'Do It Again' and 'I Can Hear The Music'."**

MELODY MAKER, MARCH 22, 1969

OF ALL THE chaotically conceived, haphazardly executed albums to appear in the aftermath of *Smile*'s collapse, *20/20* could be the most captivatingly weird. Mind you, nearly all of the band's LPs at the end of the '60s qualified for that honour, what with *Smiley Smile*'s excursions into lo-fi experimentalism, the dozy-from-the-heatstroke R'n'B of *Wild Honey* and the blissed-out odes to the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi on *Friends*.

But The Beach Boys' indifferently titled 20th long-player tops them all when it comes to its peculiar array of unexpected gems, dubious achievements, lazy space-fillers and – most startlingly – the debut appearance of two of the greatest passages in Brian Wilson's teenage symphony to God. The fact that it also includes the only fruit of the band's unfortunate dalliance with Charlie Manson and real audio of Dennis having sex with a groupie almost makes *20/20* seem overgenerous. Surely there's enough eccentricity at hand to spread over a few albums rather than store it all in one place.

Then again, The Beach Boys were in too much of a hurry. Eager to land a lucrative new record deal before the group's stock sunk any lower in the wake of *Friends*' failure and Brian's continued ill health, the band were eager to deliver the last of the albums they were contractually obligated to provide Capitol. (A legal dispute over royalties had further toxified the relationship.) Brian was not in any condition to provide much help – tellingly, he is not even included in the group shot on the cover. It was Carl who led the efforts to scrounge up the contents using various uncollected singles, leftovers and anything else they could finish up at Hollywood's United Western Recorders and Brian's home studio during the latter half of 1968.

As a result, the album is all over the place but rarely short on surprises. One of the biggest was "Do It Again", which Brian had set to lyrics that Mike Love wrote after a surfing trip with high-school friends. Unabashedly nostalgic in theme and form, it must've seemed like the same old thing when it was released as a single the previous summer. Now it seems like the never-bettered prototype for their innumerable subsequent efforts to escort fans back to the good ol' days when the "*beach was the place to go*". It's astonishingly complex for a song that lasts a mere 2:24, thanks to the dense arrangement's constantly shifting parts of fuzz guitar, barrelhouse piano, rumbling horns and vocal harmonies. With its relentlessly chugging rhythm (dig those handclaps), it's almost more Krautrock than surf music. The 1995 solo version by Brian and the "50th anniversary" rendition in 2011 are too thin to match the original's woozy fullness. As for the hammering and sawing noises in the fading moments, they were borrowed from the "Workshop" session for *Smile* in 1966, the first of *20/20*'s nods to Brian's shelved masterwork.

Next comes a Carl-spearheaded cover of the Ronettes' "I Can Hear Music", which was released as a single in March, becoming the band's last US Top 40 appearance for seven years. Even if the idea of integrating their signature vocals into a scaled-down simulation of Phil Spector's Wall Of Sound was as retrogressive as the mentions of "*California girls and a beautiful coastline*" in "Do It Again", the song's gorgeousness compensates for its overfamiliarity.

It's also far more mellifluous than *20/20*'s other covers of golden oldies: a bland take on Ersel Hickey's "Bluebirds Over The Mountain" with a lead vocal by Mike Love and some wildly incongruous acid-rock guitar; and Al Jardine's adaptation of Lead Belly's "Cotton Fields". Justly deeming Brian's original production to be too restrained, Jardine re-recorded it six months later, renamed it

"Cottonfields" and scored a sizeable hit in Europe in the spring of 1970. Jardine's frustration would continue with the final Capitol single, "Break Away", which flopped a few months later – he deemed it "90 per cent of a good record" whose problems stemmed from another half-hearted Brian production effort.

Elsewhere on *20/20*, Bruce Johnston makes his debut as a contributing songwriter with "The Nearest Faraway Place," a piano-and-strings instrumental that aims for *Pet Sounds*-like delicacy but gets mired in schmaltz. Style-wise, that puts it a million nautical miles away from Dennis' two originals. Living up to his wild-card status, he provides *20/20* with his most fully realised song to date in the beatific soft-rocker "Be With Me" and his most unbridled in "All I Want to Do", a garage-rock rave-up sung by Mike Love but "enhanced" in its final moments with the gasps and grunts from a sexual encounter that Dennis specially conducted and recorded for this purpose.

BRIAN WILSON was the dominant presence on *20/20*'s second side, though not because of the inclusion of the previous year's slight but enchanting *Friends* outtake "I Went To Sleep" and the *Wild Honey* leftover "Time To Get Alone". *Smile*'s wordless intro, "Our Prayer" made its first appearance alongside "Cabinessence", an equally captivating musical tribute to the Chinese labourers who built America's railroads, albeit as imagined by Brian and Van Dyke Parks. Carl dubbed new vocal parts onto both songs when preparing them for *20/20*, eliciting more bitter complaints from Brian. Superstitious about the negative vibes that emanated from the *Smile* tapes, Brian refused to go anywhere near the studio if they were playing.

> THERE'S ENOUGH ECCENTRICITY TO SPREAD OVER A FEW ALBUMS

And then there's Charlie Manson's part in all this, which again feels little like they've overegging things. Of course, Dennis had the sole songwriting credit when his reworking of "Cease To Exist" – a rambling, bluesy song that Manson had written specifically for the band in the hopes of earning some royalties – first appeared as "Never Learn Not To Love" on the B-side of "Bluebirds Over The Mountain" in December 1968. Since it marks the notorious historical intersection between America's Band and the freakiest hippy psycho-killer boogeyman of them all, the song inevitably retains an eerie allure, though it's really too underdeveloped to deserve its mythic status. That said, the David Lynch-worthy industrial drone that surges out of the silence during the track's first 25 seconds is legitimately terrifying. It's actually a cymbal crash played in reverse. Is that Brian's musical interpretation of the very negative vibes that he may have sensed at Dennis' place while Manson's flock took advantage of his brother's hospitality?

We may never know. Then again, nothing about The Beach Boys' Capitol swansong makes much sense, which is largely to *20/20*'s advantage.

## Trackmarks 20/20

1. Do It Again ★★★★★
2. I Can Hear Music ★★★
3. Bluebirds Over The Mountain ★★
4. Be With Me ★★★★
5. All I Want to Do ★★★
6. The Nearest Faraway Place ★
7. Cotton Fields (The Cotton Song) ★★★
8. I Went To Sleep ★★★
9. Time To Get Alone ★★★
10. Never Learn Not To Love ★★★
11. Our Prayer ★★★★★
12. Cabinessence ★★★★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Produced:** The Beach Boys
**Recorded:** United Western Recorders, Capitol Studios, Gold Star Studios, CBC Columbia Square, ID Sound and Brian's home studio, California; Bell Sound, New York
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (vocals, guitars, keys), Carl Wilson (vocals, guitars, keys), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums), Mike Love (vocals), Al Jardine (vocals), Bruce Johnston (vocals), the Wrecking Crew (various instruments)
**Highest chart position:** UK 3, US 68

Flowered up: (l–r) Johnston, Jardine, Love, Carl and Dennis Wilson, 1969

# "I don't know anything about music. I just groove around"

Just back from a Kashmiri snowdrift, Mike Love reveals all on his annual visit to the "world-famous health resort" of Great Britain. There is time, too, to refute Brian's claims the band are broke. Meanwhile, Carl is adjusting to fatherhood, Bruce is on the run in the Hollywood Hills, and Dennis is taking life very, very casually: "I give everything I have away!"

**NME** MARCH 22, 1969

THE helicopter pilot radioed to HQ. "Bandits at six o' clock," and set off in pursuit of a gang of motorcyclists who were illegally riding in the Hollywood hills. But they got away and Bruce Johnston escaped arrest again. Bruce told me about his exploits when we spoke on the transatlantic phone the other day.

In Hollywood it was 10am and Bruce was recently up. In Bordon, Hampshire, it was 7am and I was watching Vince Melouney's dog, Jasper, chase the geese out of the cottage garden.

"It's against the fire law to ride in the hills," Bruce explained, "but I'm still going to ride up there. I've been hiding but I'm gonna go again after I talk to you. If you get caught they fine you about £250. I'm gonna paint my crash helmet and bike to camouflage them."

Having promised not to immediately phone the FBI and give Bruce's plans away, I asked him what The Beach Boys had been doing and he told me that he had anticipated that question and made a list for me.

"Mike Love is taking yoga lessons, guitar lessons and flying lessons for his pilot's licence," Bruce revealed. "Al Jardine is writing songs and has written a track with Brian about a circus for the new album.

"Dennis Wilson is writing songs and producing two tracks. Someone crashed his Ferrari, they completely ruined it. Then someone came along with a tow truck and stole it!

"Carl Wilson, well, in three weeks his wife, Annie, is having their first baby. Brian Wilson is writing and producing his wife and her sister and another girl, sleeping late and playing tennis. The group is called The Honeys and they'll have a record out soon.

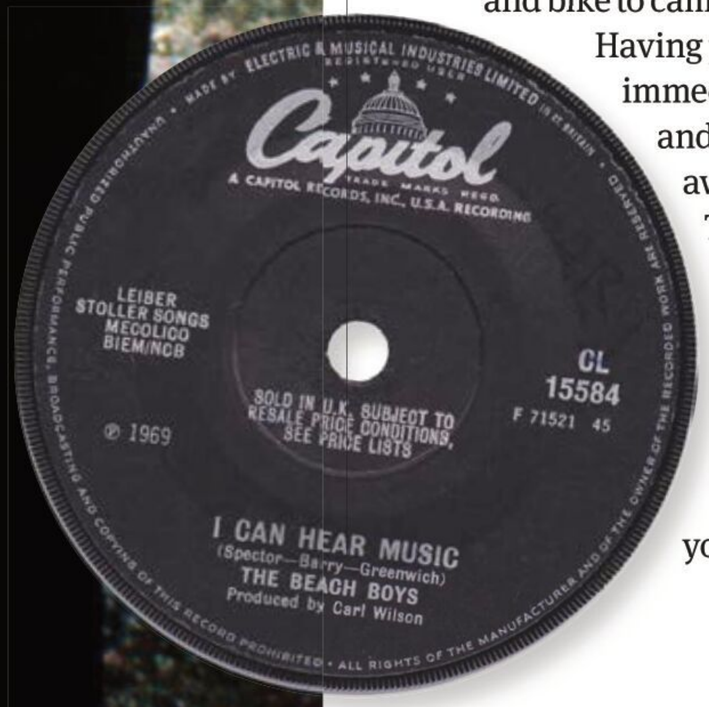
"I'm writing music for a beautiful film about surfing... It hasn't got a title yet, but the people who are making it have a movie called *Free And Easy* which they're showing at selected cinemas. It cost about £80,000 to make and they've already taken almost half a million dollars."

Then he told me about The Beach Boys as a group and their records.

"We're the last of the early '60s groups, and on April 9 I will be beginning my fifth year with The Beach Boys," he said. "'Bluebirds Over The Mountain' didn't do as well as we expected, people didn't hear enough harmony. The Beach Boys are eight years old and I guess they can afford one or two misses.

"'I Can Hear Music' (No 22 in this week's chart) is a Phil Spector song. Carl was playing it while we were flying on a tour. He was just sitting up front playing.

"We decided to put it on our new album,




RB/REDFERNS

*20/20*, then put it out as a single. It's the second Spector song we've done, the first was 'Then I Kissed Her', do you remember that one?"

Our conversation was temporarily interrupted by the arrival at the front door of a horse being ridden by a girl groom from the local manor house. Equestrian matters sorted out, we resumed our chat and Bruce commented: "I just found out The Beach Boys have sold a lot more records than The Monkees, I didn't know that.

"I thought they were the big wonders. We've sold about 15 million more records."

Then switching subjects quickly, Bruce asked me: "Did you hear about the floods here? None of us was affected but there's gonna be an earthquake between April 1 and 23. We'll be on tour then. I'm just gonna close the door. I'm not worrying about it, you can always get a new TV or car."

Then he reverted to less dramatic matters, and Bruce went on: "Mike had a couple of meetings with Donovan the week before last, but I don't know what they're doing.

"I've been in the recording studio and we're halfway through the new LP. The single has such a good title but I can't tell you it yet. It's not a 'Good Vibrations', it's more like 'Do It Again'. I remember when I joined The Beach Boys, and I crept over on my own with *Pet Sounds*. That has to be the finest Beach Boys album ever made. We spend maybe a couple of months on an LP, about six hours a day."

Then Bruce got an interruption his end and he joked: "I've received a special delivery letter from The Beach Boys. Maybe Brian's lost some weight and he's inside! A school that two of the Beach Boys went to wants us to play at their junior high school prom and they've offered us £100... We're on a £3-4,000 a night guarantee."

Then I found out how near The Beach Boys recently came to being reduced to a quartet. Bruce laughed as he told me: "Al Jardine, Carl Wilson and I went down a natural cavern in Texas to look around. I went ahead to scare them and the lady didn't see me and turned the lights out.

"I made a very ashamed noise and the lights came back on. It was very hard to keep my cool, I just yelled like a 10-year-old."

***RICHARD GREEN***

**NME JUNE 7, 1969**

I'VE always fancied myself as a bit of a pop star, having the pick of the birds, living in style, drinking bubbly and all the rest. After three days on the road with The Beach Boys, I think I'll stick to living in clubs and writing for the *NME*. Accustomed as I am to lurching from the Revolution or Speakeasy at 4am, I wasn't too happy about getting up at that hour on Thursday to meet the group at the airport.

I picked up road manager Dick Duryea en route at the Royal Lancaster Hotel and evil omens showed right away when the flight was half an hour late.

EMI's tame Clapham comptroller Mike Regan and I whiled away the early hours phoning other journalists from Heathrow and recording the resultant exclamations. Finally, the chartered VC8 touched down and Mike Love shot into a phone booth right away to telephone a girlfriend.

Bruce Johnston leaped into a car and drove off with friends, Dennis Wilson went to sleep in a limousine, Al Jardine complained of a bad eye and Carl Wilson tried to organise tapes of the new single "Break Away". It was going to be one of those days, methought.

At the hotel later, Dennis, Carl and I had a breakfast of huge and expensive omelettes and Carl told me: "My two-month-old son, Jonah, already weighs 15 pounds," to which Dennis quipped: "He's gonna be like his dad."

Carl said his father, Murry, helped produce "Break Away" and buried half the studio in matches in the process. It seems he is the world champion non-pipe smoker, never managing to keep it alight.

On a more serious subject, we discussed the astonishing story that The Beach Boys are almost broke. Carl replied: "That was Brian being paranoiac, I think. He's said some things like that before.

"He was probably referring to a period about two and a half years ago when we had a cash shortage. We may not have a lot of money in our pockets, but it's all tied up in property and investments making more. I guess we'll have plenty of opportunity to explain the truth to people during the tour."

**"WE MAY NOT HAVE A LOT OF MONEY IN OUR POCKETS, BUT IT'S ALL TIED UP IN PROPERTY AND INVESTMENTS"**
CARL WILSON

Upstairs on the hotel's 17th floor, Mike Love was wandering around in a towel while his 22-year-old brother, Steve, relaxed on the bed. Steve has just graduated with top honours and his gift from Mike was a European trip and a new Volkswagen fastback.

Having spent three hours at the airport a couple of weeks ago with the intrepid Foxy Fowler from Arthur Howe's office awaiting Mike's non-arrival from India, I enquired as to his disappearance.

"Oh, I got snowed up in Kashmir," explained Mike. "No, really," he hastily added, seeing my smile of disbelief. "For five days I was stuck in the snow and I missed my first-ever Beach Boys concert. Who replaced me? I am irreplaceable, didn't you know?"

Then came the first of The Beach Boys' vitamin performances. Being Mike, he had to top the lot with his tale.

"These," he proudly announced, tipping some objects into a glass of water, "are natural seeds that the Indians eat for stamina. They enable them to chase a rabbit all day until the rabbit drops down."

Later, Bruce and I went down to Radio One Club where a severe mobbing was in evidence. He met Andy Fairweather Low and Richie Havens, then went off to do a "Scene And Heard" interview. Dennis was off taking a river trip, having taken Carl and I into Hyde Park to sunbathe, and Carl and Al had gone to bed.

Mass rehearsals with 11 musicians and Joe Hicks in the hotel promised good things for the Brighton concert the next day. Mike had already gone down there for a spot of what Bruce called "transcendental passion".

Bruce elected to travel with Dennis on the coach the next morning, claiming: "This bus is a trip," and as we passed Streatham Common, Bruce asked me: "Hey what's that? Could I live there and build a ranch? It's outta sight."

"Dennis changes his clothes every tour, he's our own hippy," Bruce joked.

Paul Revere's featured singer, Mark Lindsay, came over to my seat and commented: "There are plans to release a live album we did in 1964 which Bruce produced. He almost became Paul Revere, but he decided to go surfing, then he joined The Beach Boys."

He calculated that the Raiders have done over 700 TV shows and that their own programme was seen by 18 million people five days a week!

"Two and a half years ago, when we lost our bass player, we were thinking of asking Bruce to join us again," Mark revealed. "Yeah, I was browned off with The Beach Boys, it was that bad period," Bruce agreed, no doubt thinking how fortunate he had been in making the decision to stay with what must be the world's top working group.

While the group began rehearsals at Brighton's Dome, I went for a drink and re-emerged into the bright sunshine to find Al watching the intricate process of loading beer into the pub's cellar. He hadn't witnessed that feat before.

At Brighton, Mike appeared onstage in a cowl and flowing robe looking for all the world like John The Baptist with a sense of humour, Bruce wore a multi-coloured shirt and doubled on guitar and organ. Carl wore a loose surfer's shirt, and Al and Dennis settled for conventional suits.

They did 20 numbers during their set, which over-ran by 20 minutes, and were aided by a nice backing of musicians under the direction of John DeAndreas.

It was amazing the way in which they managed to create their record sound on stage, even down to the freaky noises on "Good Vibrations".

With Love on their side: The Beach Boys perform "Do It Again" on *Top Of The Pops*, November 1968

Opening with "I Can Hear Music", they included "Wouldn't It Be Nice", "California Girls", "Darlin'", "I Get Around", "Cotton Fields", "Do It Again", "Break Away", "Barbara Ann" (where was Keith Moon?), "God Only Knows", a medley of their slow numbers and "Their Hearts Were Full Of Spring", which they sang without instrumental backing and went down a storm.

Interspersed with jokes and Mike's clowning – "I'm sending round a tambourine for a collection as we're broke!" – The Beach Boys delighted everyone and gave as good a concert as I have seen for many a year.

They brought with them giant soul singer Joe Hicks, who was not unlike Otis Redding. He bounced, plodded and stamped about the stage, earned encores and gave a tremendous show. He has been signed to Brother Records, the Boys' own label, and is destined to be very big.

His numbers were "Respect", "My Girl", "Shake", "I've Been Loving You Too Long", "Hey Jude", "I Can Turn You Loose", and "Try A Little Tenderness". Everyone took to the genial singer and he deserved every last cheer.

I gather that Mark Lindsay was anxious lest I reviewed Paul Revere And The Raiders' Brighton concert, so I watched the Hammersmith set, as well. However, my opinion did not alter... I can really see no reason why the group should not repeat their phenomenal American success here.

It relies upon Mark for effect and though he looks and sounds good there is little in the presentation that hasn't been done before. Inoffensive to the ear they may have been, but where was the originality? Anyway, numbers like "Ups And Downs", "Him Or Me", "Games People Play", "Good Thing", Jim Webb's "First Hymn From Grand Terrace" (which is Mark's next solo single) and "Let Me" were received fairly well but without undue enthusiasm.

Back in London, Bruce decided he'd like to go to the Midnight Court at the Lyceum and see Steppenwolf. It was three by the time we got there and he had missed the group, so we settled for a box, several bottles of champers and The Nice.

"They are fantastic, I've never seen a group like them," Bruce enthused. "This is a great scene, I'd like to play here."

The Nice played two encores, being onstage for almost two hours of amazing music and at the Hammersmith concert the following evening, Bruce announced from the stage: "I saw The Nice last night. They are the best group I've seen and you must all see them. I'm now their No 1 fan."

We finally staggered out into the dazzling morning sun at about six and slept until late afternoon. By the evening, however, the scene was set for the Hammersmith concert. It was full house both times and The Beach Boys cemented their reputation of being a supergroup without the current connotations.

It was three days since I'd joined up with them and heavy eyelids and writer's cramp got the better of me. There were some pleasant memories of the 72 hours.

Al Jardine asking if Brighton was a surfing scene; a girl called Jan taking time off from her GCEs to wait patiently for the group's autographs and being rewarded by being invited backstage; Bruce sleeping on top of a piano onstage; Mike threatening to invade Tibet; me being mistaken for Carl and chased along Bayswater Road!

So many more. Arthur Howes must be rubbing his hands with glee and already fixing next year's tour. I, for one, can't wait for that.

***RICHARD GREEN***

## MELODY MAKER JUNE 7, 1969

"BROKE?" said bearded Beach Boy Mike Love, "Beach Boys broke?

"Well, all I can say is that it's a relative world and there are relative truths in it," he answered, neatly sidestepping the prevalent reports that the group, here for a new sell-out British tour, are on their uppers.

Mike, the Beach Boy who embraced the philosophy of love last year and remains

RON HOWARD/REDFERNS

affable even after a wearisome 12-hour flight from America's West Coast, wouldn't be drawn on reports that Brian Wilson had said the group was approaching financial disaster point.

And to be honest, he's the happiest-looking pauper I've ever seen.

So I switched the line of attack, and asked about further stories that the group were playing to poor houses in America.

"I know Brian said that, but I believe it was an elaboration of the situation which obtained last year," said Mike, still not losing his bonhomie.

"We were booked for a 30-day tour of the Southern States of America when a certain gentleman named Martin Luther King was murdered and the tour was cancelled.

"But we have just come from a weekend tour in the States. We played three dates over one weekend and they were all sellouts."

This new Beach Boys tour (sellout that it is) is likely to put a few quid back into the group's pocket at any rate.

"But we don't do it for the money," protested Mike to mock indignation. "We come here because Britain is a world-famous health resort. Certain producers implore us to take money for the trip and out of the goodness of our hearts we do, but more to please them than us."

I asked Mike what the group had been doing musically over the past few months. "Oh, recording. I don't know anything about music. That's Brian, Carl, Alan and Dennis' department, I just groove around. But I know that one of our new songs we'll be doing on the tour, 'Break Away', is my most favourite song of all in seven years.

"It's a lot different. There's a lot of chemistry and different elements in it, and it has some beautiful harmonies."

Ah, I thought, grasping at straws, harmonies. What about their recent stage shows when people complained that the backing was so loud, it swamped their harmonies?

"Well, that could be so, but I'm surprised to hear it because we have a pretty good PA system and our sound man is usually very good."

Nevertheless, I persisted, when I saw the group at the first house at the London Palladium last December, I felt their vocal ability was drowned by the backing.

"First house is occasionally a little rougher," admitted Mike. "On a one-nighter tour every hall has its own sound problem. We have to overcome each one separately.

"We usually manage to beat the acoustical problems. But first houses are occasionally poorer than second. The audience, too, is different – you get the younger people in and there are far more screams. The second house audience is usually far more astute. Perhaps you should have come to second house at the Palladium."

Musically, The Beach Boys will probably be undergoing subtle but definite changes in the future.

"We are to experiment with spiritual things – spiritual in the negro spiritual musical sense that is," said Mike. "We'll probably prune appearances down to four things a year – a tour of colleges, then a tour of radio stations, and then Europe, that sort of thing. But we will still be playing in Britain regularly."

Suddenly Mike threw a question at me: "Do you think June is the right time for us to tour here?" he asked.

I didn't think it would be, but box office takings prove me wrong and I said so.

"Well, we've always played in the fall here when things are dark and damp. With our image, from our name and the surfing thing, we thought it would be nice to come at the beginning of summer when the weather is nice and the sun's shining. And look, it's a gorgeous day today."

So it was, but outside the *MM* office the dark clouds were gathering for our daily downpour. But that's one of the things you have to like about The Beach Boys: their optimism.

***ALAN WALSH***

RB/REDFERNS

"We come here because Britain is a world-famous health resort": in the UK, May 1969

**MELODY MAKER** JUNE 14, 1969

THEY SAY that fat people are jolly. It might be discourteous to call Beach Boy Carl Wilson fat; in fact, he keeps a watchful eye on his weight – he diets and takes plenty of exercise. But he is well built. And very affable.

There are none of the monosyllabic, don't-bug-me-man replies from Carl to journalistic probings. And he is very considerate to fans. Moreover, he has a fascinating memory for names. All round, he is, in fact, the embodiment of the dicta laid down in Dale Carnegie's bestseller, *How To Win Friends And Influence People*.

Take fans. They were hammering on the dressing room windows on the opening night of the Beach Boys tour at the Dome, Brighton. Carl had had a mammoth plane journey, a car trip, and little to eat. He was pretty tired. But, like Daniel braving the lions, he opened the window and cracked jokes with the teeny-boppers leaping around like firecrackers. He even welcomed a couple backstage who had travelled from Maidstone especially for the concert. Only to find both shows were a sell-out.

To keep trim for The Beach Boys' rigorous routine, Carl plays tennis. "I play for hours and hours," he says. "You've got to do this, otherwise you find you're going over the fence," he added in a picturesque reference to his avoirdupois. "Brian is a great tennis player. He's

good at baseball, too. He could have got into the major league."

Carl is pretty happy with his working routine. Though, these days, The Beach Boys pick and choose their dates. None of them are that keen on long-distance travelling, and they have reached the position where they can afford to take it easy, or concentrate on recordings.

"We do a lot of charity shows," says Carl. "Prison work, especially. We played at McAlester Prison, Oklahoma, and did another one at Louisburg, New Jersey."

And how did the captive audience react?

"Well, they didn't have a chance to get out," cracks Carl.

Carl doesn't feel that his present niche is the be-all and end-all of his career. "You have to have other interests; otherwise you get hung up. But I am fortunate in that I dig music. I'm doing something I really want to do."

Many pop stars have turned to acting and made a successful parallel career in it. Carl has no strong ambitions to be an actor, but he'd like to make a stab at it.

"I feel I'd have something to offer if I did turn to acting," he said. "I'd like to try it and see what I could make out of it. I'd like to get the feel of the camera. In fact, I wouldn't mind being a camera operator. I think you could get a lot more from that than acting. I'd like to direct, too. But I'm not sure I'd know how to direct," he added with honest candour.

In this respect, Carl recalls a visit to an American Indian, a sort of guru named George. Carl, in fact, visits him regularly. "He said I could be a noted actor," he recalls.

But, of more immediate interest, are a forthcoming Beach Boys album – "We're working on it now," says Carl – and a projected tour of South Africa. "We had one planned for last January, but we had to put it off. Then we planned to go this month (June), but it would have been for seven weeks, and that would have been too long. We don't like any promoter to get uptight, so we're intending to go next January."

Carl looked blank when we mentioned the possibility of segregated concerts. He had obviously not heard of apartheid. And he seemed disturbed at its implications. But apart from expressing some astonishment at the pass laws, he made no further comments on the projected tour.

particular form of psychological masochism, though, when I called round to London's plush Londonderry Hotel on Monday. Two girls – one blonde and continental, the other dark and Liverpudlian, sat in the lounge of his suite while he ate three bananas and cream, and drank coffee. He talked about his American home, which, he admitted, is a one-room cellar in a friend's house. "I live there out of desire," he explained, "I'm living where I want. I look at the room as my mind. There's a piano in there, there's a bed, and that's all I need.

"What do you need in a home? People have so much rubbish – clocks and watches and they're scared of breaking them.

"I've lived in a beautiful home in Beverly Hills, in harems, in the mountains, with a family, but where I like best is where I am now. I want to achieve happiness.

"My goal is all the things we put out. It's a lot of personal satisfaction to have a hit record, you bump into friends and say: 'Look what we've done.' It's great. We won't put a thing out unless we're happy with it."

Our serious conversation – which, with Dennis, is something of a rarity – was interrupted by a floor manager entering. "What time are you leaving?" he inquired of the drummer boy. "Tomorrow."

"I understand you were leaving at half-past-twelve today and it's two-thirty now."

"Oh, really. Well I'll just eat your food then move downstairs."

Downstairs was Mike Love's room, which was being used as an office and centre of Beach Boys operations by Carl, Mike, Bruce, Al, Mike's brother Steve, and Ed Carson, the guitarist.

Harping back to his earlier theme, Dennis told me: "I love freedom and I love people who can express themselves. People have different ways of expressing themselves, some by hostility, some through love."

It's pretty hard to understand Dennis' attitude towards life. Half the time, you're not sure if he is being serious, as he tends to see the humorous side of things and takes life very, very casually. But he went on: "I still give my money away. I give everything I have away. What I'm wearing and what's in that case is all I have. I don't even have a car. I have a 1934 Dodge pickup somewhere. I can have anything I want any time, it's just the way I want it. If I want anything I can send out and get it. I can even get it by smiling, but I don't."

**"IF I WANT ANYTHING I CAN SEND OUT AND GET IT. I CAN EVEN GET IT BY SMILING, BUT I DON'T"**
DENNIS WILSON

One of the girls left to catch a plane and the other began packing for Dennis. As she did so, I asked him what he thought had kept The Beach Boys together for so long and how long he reckoned they could remain a group.

"We have a great love for each other, and respect," he replied immediately. "That's one of the things that's kept us together so long. And the family. We can be The Beach Boys as long as we want to. We can be The Beach Boys until we're 83! I don't know how long I'll be with The Beach Boys, I can still do whatever I want and still be in the group. Once I wanted to be a gardener. I wanted to be the skipper of a boat. I wanted to join the Forestry Commission. I would like to be Elmer Gantry into his thing..."

At this point he stood up on a chair, waved his arms about and yelled: "Yes, I understand! There's only one thing you need in this world! I understand it all!"

I beat a hasty retreat and went along to a film studio in Oxford Street where Mike and Carl were watching the editing of movie footage that has been taken during their tour.

Mike was drinking wine, and eating grapes and cheese. He was anxious to talk about the alleged poverty of the group, so we sat quietly while he began jokingly: "We're definitely finished, all through and washed up," then, with a change of tone, "except for one little thing – to set the record straight we'd have to get rid of a few million dollars in real estate, investments and buildings. The phrase is, we're cash poor – we don't have money in our pockets."

Why, then, did Brian say all those things?

"He is completely ignorant of the situation, except he knows there are a few thousand dollars hanging around the bank and that's broke to him. He has not got the business acumen to know about it. He enjoys being in a muddle by virtue of being sorry for himself.

"He's one of those people who's so caught up in their job or business that they don't see anything else, it's like not being able to see the forest for the trees.

"It's the same for Dennis; they both grab essentials, but specifics stay in their minds for two seconds. Dennis is very concerned about money – when it comes down to wanting it.

"Consequently, Bruce, Al, Carl and I are concerned with the money side, like The Beatles: Paul McCartney tries to keep it together, John is freaking with Yoko, George is in his Indian thing and Ringo is concerned with being a film star."

***RICHARD GREEN***

**NME** JUNE 28, 1969

BRIAN WILSON may try to have us believe otherwise, but The Beach Boys really do have quite a bit of money stashed away. Enough, in fact, to keep them going for a long time. But, despite this, Dennis chooses to live in a state of self-imposed near poverty.

He wasn't practising this

The only Beach Boy who could surf: Dennis Wilson in 1964

EARL LEAF/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

# "We're updating ourselves a little"

Brian Wilson's tentative return to the road is halted by what is reputedly an attack of hearing trouble. The 1970s are bringing a fresh wave of Beach Boys experimentation, however; the glories of *Surf's Up* are on the horizon. "Til I Die" is "about the things you are and always will be", reckons Al Jardine, a man traumatised from visiting Mike Love's psychic: "I shouldn't eat Spanish food because it's bad for a Virgo."

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

Backstage at *Top Of The Pops*, London, November 18, 1970: (*l–r*) Carl Wilson, Bruce Johnston, Mike Love, Al Jardine, Dennis Wilson

## NME APRIL 25, 1970

WHEN The Beach Boys finally sort out their British tour and do come over, it will be a different sound from usual that we'll be hearing. After many years of happy-go-lucky surf type things the group has shifted its position somewhat.

"As each year passes, we drop old numbers and bring in new ones, and we'll be doing a lot of things from our next American album, *Sunflower*, which is out in the early summer," Bruce Johnston told me.

Bruce is very much the spokesman for the group these days, and one fine morning he decided to call me and tell me what's going on.

The fact that it was before 9am in England didn't occur to Bruce, who had just returned to his Hollywood home after a night out watching Manfred Mann play. To Bruce it was just after midnight and not too late (or early) at all.

"Hel-lo," he called in his friendly top o' the morning way, "and how are you today? Is this a good time to call, what is it there?"

As I tried to wake up properly, Bruce happily went on about all the new things that are affecting him and the group. They ranged from his new motorcycle, to a girl singer he's discovered, to Brian Wilson.

"The numbers we're doing and have been doing on our last American tour are all pretty new and people seem to like them," he pointed out. "You'll probably be seeing six Beach Boys in England... Brian's touring again after five years.

"He toured here in February and March and enjoyed it, but he won't be on the Australian tour, because his passport won't be through in time. He's still writing and producing and he'll be working on the album while we're away."

Bruce explained that one of the reasons The Beach Boys haven't had any singles released here since "Break Away" got to No 6 in the *NME* chart last June is the question of terms with record companies.

"Now we have formed our own record label you have to get the right terms for your artists," he informed me in the business-like manner that he occasionally adopts. "We have The Flames [*aka The Flame*] coming out with a record called "See The Light" and an album called *Long Playing*, and I have a Mary Hopkin singer called Amy. She's 15 years old and the daughter of a record company vice-president. I discovered her through an ex-girlfriend."

Despite laws to the contrary, Bruce still goes up into the Hollywood hills on his motorcycle with his friends. He has recently acquired a Suzuki from Japan and he finds this ideal for racing in the dirt and charging about the hills.

After telling me that The Beach Boys would like to play the Isle Of Wight festival this year, he went on about plans the group has for its own shindig.

"We own 416 acres of land in Simi Valley, that's 40 miles north of LA, and we'd like to run a pop festival there.

"We'd like to hold a Woodstock there in the summer if we can get the right groups. We got offered a festival in Sheffield, but we couldn't find anyone who knew anything about it, so we dropped that idea."

With Michel LeGrand who co-wrote "Windmills Of Your Mind", Bruce has been doing some songwriting and he's particularly proud of a thing called "Deirdre" that will be on the next British album.

"That's been my real ambition to write this sort of song," Bruce continued. "I'm learning to write songs properly now, I'd like to get into film music eventually."

On his last visit to England, Bruce spent a lot of time looking around the countryside for somewhere to live. He still intends to buy a place here and now says that he should have done that in two-and-a-half years' time. "I can get 50 acres of land in England for what I have to pay for one in America." he stated. "Just you wait, I'll be over there soon among you all."

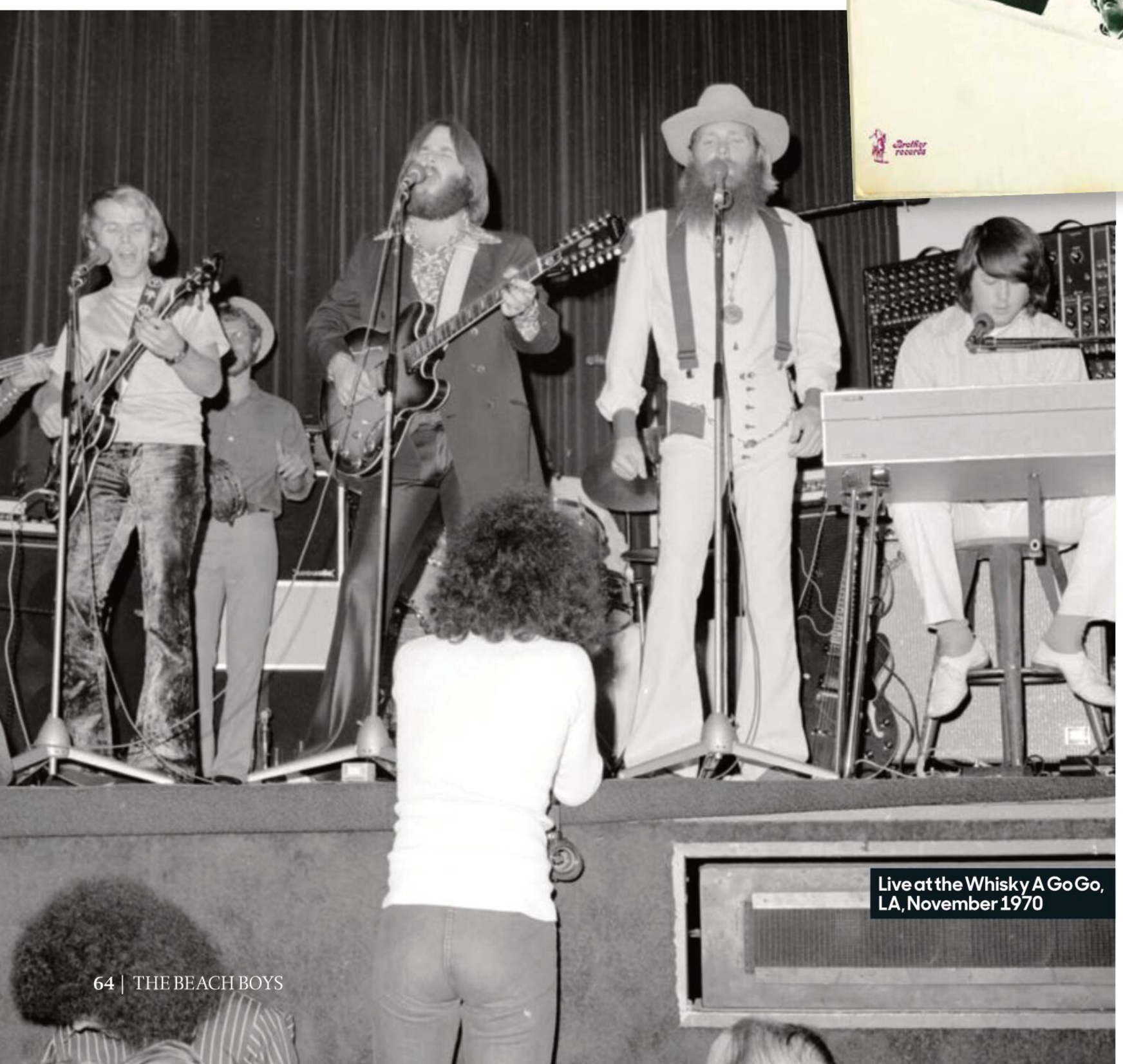
Bruce is just starting his sixth year as a member of The Beach Boys and, to celebrate, he took a party of friends to a Japanese restaurant and then on to a night club where The Four Freshmen were appearing.

"Do you know what they sang?" he asked. "They sang 'Surfer Girl', which is kind of nice."

Mike Love, it seems, is still deeply involved with meditation and Bruce informed me that he and Mike will be visiting the Brighton Meditation Centre again this year. I have been included on the visiting list, apparently, as Bruce enjoyed his introduction to dodgems that I effected for him last year. I wonder if he's tried the helter skelter at the end of the Palace Pier?

***RICHARD GREEN***

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



Live at the Whisky A Go Go, LA, November 1970

## NME NOVEMBER 21, 1970




AL JARDINE sitting quietly drinking tea, Bruce Johnston looking like a trainee astronaut with huge sun goggles and red flying jacket, Carl and Dennis Wilson already in bed and Mike Love striding about the lobby wrapped in a giant-size overcoat. The Beach Boys were back in the London they love so much on Monday morning.

Their plane from LA actually arrived 15 minutes early and they went straight to the Inn On The Park hotel to sleep before a press reception that evening.

Al was the widest awake, though none

of them had slept on the flight. So I joined him at a quiet table in the corner and he brought me up to date on Beach Boys activities of late.

First I asked him about Brian's health since his fresh attack of hearing trouble two weeks ago.

"He's in great shape, he's fine, but he's never had the best of hearing and the way we played at the Whisky was pretty excruciating with four or five hundred people jammed up real tight," he replied. "He told me in the dressing room between sets he wasn't going to make the next show and I said, 'OK, that's all right, go home and get some rest.' I had it all set up to wear ear plugs, but you can't wear ear plugs and sing because you hear too much of your own voice, so I tossed them aside.

"I've noticed some level changes in my own ears. I went to the doctor for a check-up and he said my hearing was OK, but I don't know how much better it had been before I went to him.

"Brian has reason to fear, but usually when you lose an organ, the other one gets stronger to compensate. Maybe sometimes I'd be talking to him at the piano and he wouldn't hear me.

"I have to ask which ear is the bad one. I really should know after all this time. Anytime we have dinner we have to do a big table shift so that he can hear, because two of the group are left-handed and you all have to sit in the right places!"

Brian used to appear regularly with the group and I wondered why he stopped that.

"Maybe the reason he gave up playing was there wasn't the inspiration on the road," Al mused. "The travelling got too much for him and you don't often find a piano, only at Holiday Inns."

Al, who was wearing a 1930s badge bearing a picture of Oscar Mayer, "the man who made hot dogs famous", told me that he'd been twice to see a psychic friend of Mike Love's who had predicted all sorts of weird things.

"He told me I should live in Europe or the Hawaiian Islands and that I shouldn't eat Spanish food because it's bad for a Virgo," Al pointed out. "I had a baby son recently and he told me that he'll be in the theatre but he won't be a homosexual!"

Al and Mike are being joined by their families during the group's cabaret week in the North, then the families are moving on to Greece where the husbands will join them after the tour.

"We accepted an offer to do a cabaret week in Sydney and we had such a far-out time we decided to try and get one in England," Al explained. "We're looking forward to it, but there's only one show a night and that's going to leave a lot of idle time. One thing we've never had is time."

Bruce told the *NME* a while back that the title of The Beach Boys' next album may be 'The Fading Rock Group Revival' and, as it turned out to be something else, I asked Al what had become of that idea.

"I think that may have been Bruce's way of describing an oldies and goldies album," he said with a smile after a moment's thought. Mike Love got inspired to rewrite an old number called "Riot In Cell Block No 9", which was a big hit at the Big Sur festival on the West Coast and that started it.

"I think it's called 'Student Demonstration' now, and it depicts the college aspects of demonstration in America right now. We have another album that's in the can, though it just needs more doctoring. The Moog is on it and there's a lot of good music, a lot of humour. There's a lot of the old style and a lot of very, very new style.

"There's a song about going to work and getting paid, a number called ''Til I Die' about the things you are and always will be, and one about an airplane that Brian and I wrote.

"We recorded it in Brian's studio. We've just bought a 16-track machine. It's one of those things we've always been meaning to get, but we've been renting them when we should have bought one long ago. Brian wants a new piano, I think he wants a Steinway. We got some new guitars and a Hammond organ – we haven't used one for years, since 'Good Vibrations'. We're just updating ourselves a little."

Al revealed that The Beach Boys have only worked six weeks so far this year, the rest of the time being used up recording two albums, or organising the studio or sorting out their many business interests. He added that onstage now the group is playing mainly "post *Pet Sounds*" numbers and old familiar favourites will be confined to encores.

He is concerned about the price of albums and also the problem of bootlegging.

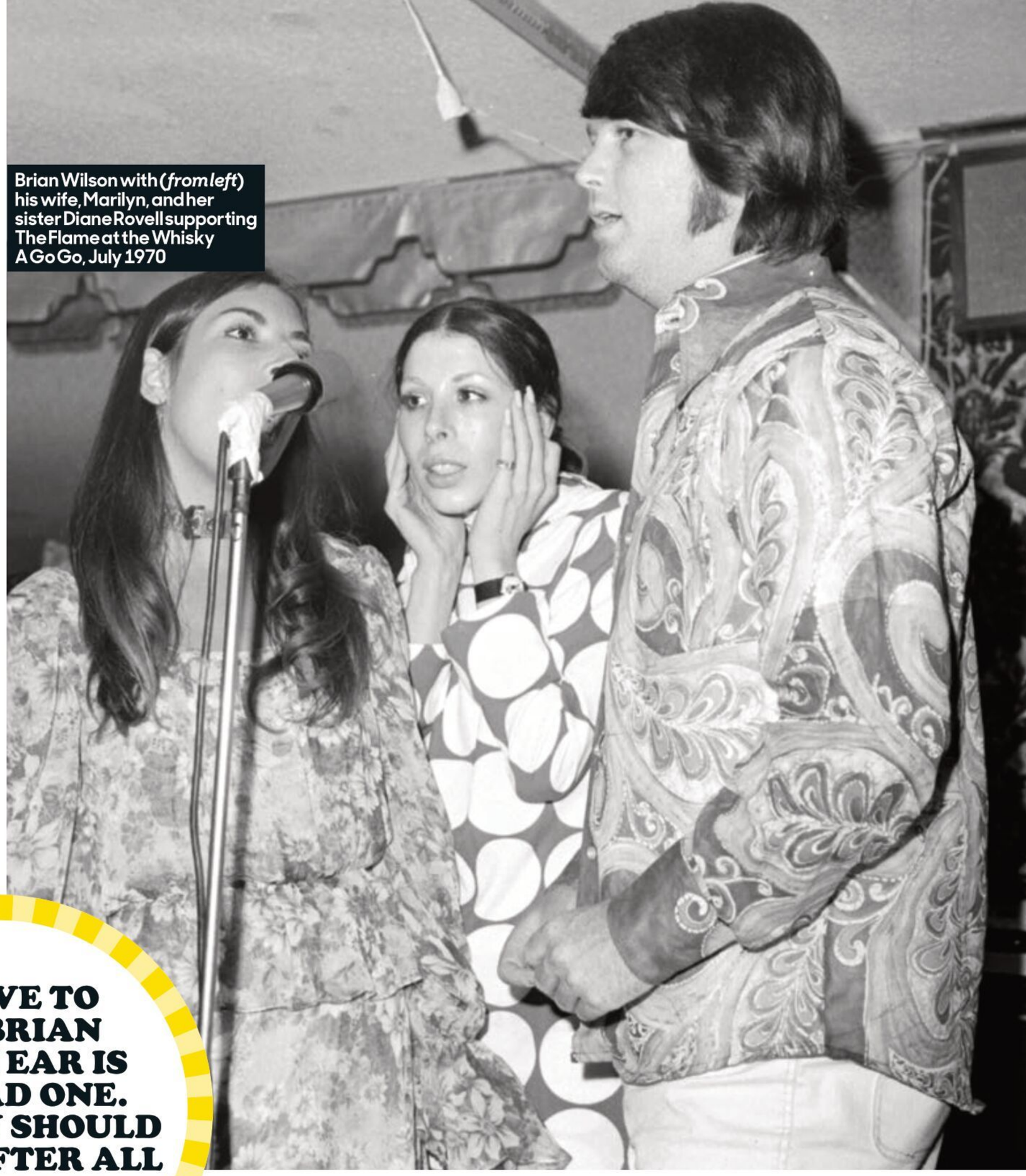
"Bootlegging is the biggest problem in the United States," He emphasised. "There's just no way to stop it. They've got some of our albums, but who can tell how many? If you can buy the same album with a little less quality at half the price, sure. Why not? The record industry is being forced underground by prices.

"The companies could trim down the cake a little and pass some of the profits on to the consumer or the artist. Unless you're big, you're gonna be broke when you leave the business, so they should give you the chance to earn a little while you can.

"Jan Berry, of Jan & Dean, just got hit for income tax. They really slapped it on him for those surf records they used to make. He's a maître d' at a restaurant now. He was so seriously hurt in the car smash he was just a vegetable, but he's coming on and enjoying life now. I think he's getting back in the record business.

"At Brother Records we have a pretty good profit-sharing thing for our artists now and hopefully we will be able to sort the problem out. The American Recreation Company is a public company and we're major stockholders in return for their getting Brother, which they are about to acquire. By virtue of that, we can be a very generous record company."

***RICHARD GREEN***



Brian Wilson with (*from left*) his wife, Marilyn, and her sister Diane Rovell supporting The Flame at the Whisky A Go Go, July 1970

**"I HAVE TO ASK BRIAN WHICH EAR IS THE BAD ONE. I REALLY SHOULD KNOW AFTER ALL THIS TIME"**

AL JARDINE

EARL LEAF/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: AUGUST 31, 1970

# SUNFLOWER

**It's about time! In which Carl and Dennis Wilson emphatically come of age.** BY BUD SCOPPA

**Critics' Verdict**

"The group has produced this album themselves, which is varied and interesting and recorded with a simplicity that is misleading."
NME, MARCH 16, 1968

THE BEACH BOYS rode out the '60s through choppy waters, as their eight-year run with Capitol came to an inauspicious end in June 1969 following four straight commercial duds, with a lawsuit accusing the label of unpaid royalties serving as a sour grace note. Brian's fragile mental state had made him a hit-and-miss contributor since the aborted *Smile*, and with their visionary leader no longer at the helm, the group flirted with irrelevance.

With their backs against the wall, the other five members entered an industrious phase, individually and in various combinations. Their seemingly unshakeable self-confidence got a timely lift when, in November 1969, they inked a deal with Warner/Reprise, then widely regarded as the classiest of West Coast labels, thanks in part to the pitching of their buddy Van Dyke Parks, who'd managed to score a full-time gig at WB. The Beach Boys revived their Brother label for the occasion – a move that turned out to be fitting, because it coincided with Carl and Dennis' artistic comings of age. The younger Wilson brothers had assimilated the rich musical language authored by Brian, and they used it as the foundation of their own efforts.

*Sunflower* presents The Beach Boys as a functioning democracy, sharing the workload and churning out a bounty of new music. In order to take full advantage of Brian's intermittent inspired moments, innovative engineer/mixer Stephen Desper – who'd been part of The Beach Boys' recording team since *Smiley Smile* – oversaw a significant upgrade to the recording facility in Brian's house on Bellagio Road in Bel Air. The new tracking room and adjacent control room were strategically situated immediately beneath Brian's bedroom, through the floor of which "Brian monitored studio activities whether he wanted to or not", as Desper noted in his illuminating book *Recording The Beach Boys*. The house became a whirlwind of activity, as the group and a parade of contributing players including keyboardist Daryl Dragon (who's singled out for thanks in the album credits) and his drummer brother Dennis Dragon filled reel after reel of two-inch, 16-track tape with crystalline sounds.

According to Desper, each of the six band members had between two and eight songs in some stage of production at any given time. Coordinating this massive undertaking was 22-year-old Carl, who was proving that singing like an angel was but one of his talents. The Beach Boys got the production credit for the album, but Carl functioned as its producer. That left him with little time to work on his own material, but no one would play a bigger role in the process that led to *Sunflower*. When, in mid-February 1970, the band had what everyone agreed was a album's worth of strong material, Carl sequenced the dozen chosen tunes, and a mastered reference LP was messengered to Warner Bros Chairman Mo Ostin at the company's Burbank headquarters. Ostin, who had entered the music business as an accountant, then showed why he's considered to be one of the greatest label heads ever by rejecting the album and urging them to come back with a record worthy of their storied history. Once The Beach Boys got over the initial devastation, that is precisely what they proceeded to do.

The group and Desper laboured day and night for the next several weeks, working up new material, reworking some of the tracks from the rejected version of the album and going through the tracks Dennis had been working on for the previous year or so in search of keepers. Dennis had grown as a writer and lead singer, placing two songs apiece on *Friends* and *20/20*; "Slip On Through", his lone contribution to version one of *Sunflower*, was shot through with tuneful exuberance and propulsive energy. By the time Carl had put together a running order for the version Ostin and A&R head

Lenny Waronker would deem worthy of release, Dennis' songs made up a third of the album: "Slip On Through", now the Side One opener; the Jerry Lee Lewis-style piano pounder "Got To Know The Woman"; the high-octane powerpop progenitor "It's About Time", sung by Carl; and the drop-dead-gorgeous ballad "Forever", the latter foreshadowing the windswept vistas of *Pacific Ocean Blue*. This quartet quickens *Sunflower*'s pulse while providing the record with much of its heart and soul.

BRIAN'S presence can be felt not just in the *Pet Sounds* echoes clearly heard in the intricate, syncopated backing vocals and the distinctive instrumental ornamentation, but also in the foreground on much of the album – it appears the positioning of the studio below him had reawakened the sleeping giant, because he had a hand in the writing of seven songs and was an active participant in the sessions. That unmistakable tremor reassuringly appears in the opening of the delectable "This Whole World", track two in Carl's canny sequence. Brian then takes one of the trade-off lead vocals in the following "Add Some Music To Your Day". More significantly, he shows up for *Sunflower*'s blissfully laidback second half.

Side Two opens with "Tears In The Morning", the second of Bruce Johnston's two contributions (the other is the Neil Diamond-like "Deirdre", a Brian co-write tucked into the penultimate slot on Side One), and continues with the gently lapping Brian-Mike Love collab "All I Wanna Do", which bridges the group's mid-'60s heights and its early-'70s rebirth. Brian, who'd tailored *Pet Sounds*' "God Only Knows" and "Caroline, No" to Carl's unearthly tenor, does it again in league with Carl and Al Jardine with "Our Sweet Love", perfectly complementing the preceding "Forever". The album reaches a mellow climax with Brian and Al's whimsical "At My Window", setting up the stunning closer, "Cool, Cool Water", on which Mike's chants and Brian's falsetto reveries float through the ocean fog. The ties that bind *Sunflower* and the succeeding *Surf's Up* are strikingly apparent in the twofer CD that combines the LPs, as "Cool, Cool Water" flows into "Don't Go Near The Water", which opens *Surf's Up*, as if they were one song.

Thus, at a peak moment for vocal blends, between CSN&Y, The Band, Three Dog Night, Delaney & Bonnie, Badfinger and *Abbey Road*, a group that wasn't made for those times got off the mat and connected. Puzzlingly, hardly anybody apart from the critics gave *Sunflower* a second thought when the record was released in August 1970; it was The Beach Boys' lowest-charting LP in the US to that point. Nonetheless, working as a fully functioning interactive unit for the first time, they'd crafted what turned out to be one of the most inviting stiff albums ever released.

*SUNFLOWER* PRESENTS THE BEACH BOYS AS A DEMOCRACY, SHARING THE WORKLOAD

## Trackmarks SUNFLOWER

1. Slip On Through ★★★★★
2. This Whole World ★★★★★
3. Add Some Music To Your Day ★★★★
4. Got To Get The Woman ★★★★
5. Deirdre ★★★★
6. It's About Time ★★★★★
7. Tears In The Morning ★★★
8. All I Wanna Do ★★★★
9. Forever ★★★★★
10. Our Sweet Love ★★★★
11. At My Window ★★★
12. Cool, Cool Water ★★★★★

**Label:** Brother/Reprise
**Produced:** The Beach Boys
**Recorded:** Brian Wilson's house, Gold Star and Sunset Sound, Los Angeles
**Personnel:** Al Jardine (guitar, vocals), Bruce Johnston (piano, vocals), Mike Love (vocals), Brian Wilson (keyboards, vocals), Carl Wilson (guitar, vocals), Dennis Wilson (drums, vocals), Daryl Dragon, Doug Dragon and Larry Knechtel (keyboards), Dennis Dragon, Earl Palmer and John Guerin (drums), Ed Carter, Jerry Cole, David Cohen and Al Casey (guitars), Ray Pohlman, James Bond, John Conrad and Joe Osborne (bass), Frank Capp and Gene Estes (percussion), additional unidentified instrumentalists
**Highest chart position:** UK 29, US 151

RELEASED: AUGUST 30, 1971

# SURF'S UP

**The columnated ruins finally domino, as Brian and the boys take a mature, contemplative trip back to the ocean.**

BY JOHN ROBINSON

## Critics' Verdict

"Could The Beach Boys actually be doing Moody Blues? The whole theme of this is – the world might be in a pretty dismal state, but it's up to us to try to improve that."

RICHARD GREEN, NME, NOVEMBER 6, 1971

"From first to last, it flows and evolves, from the almost-lush decadence of the first verse to the childlike wonder and open-hearted joy of the final chorale."

RICHARD WILLIAMS, MELODY MAKER, NOVEMBER 13, 1971

THE BEACH BOYS might easily have made an album called *Surf's Up!!!* in 1963. Inside it, girls danced at record hops, cars containing surfboards were driven to the beach, and American youth enjoyed blue skies, clear water, and the fruits of the postwar boom. On the cover, the near-teenage band rolled up their trouser legs and smiled at the camera. But of course it didn't happen quite that way, and *Surf's Up* (The Beach Boys' 22nd album), had no exclamation marks. Instead, it acknowledged how much the band and the world had changed since their youth, and attempted to figure out what, if anything, had stayed the same. Van Dyke Parks told *Rolling Stone* that he visited the band during recording and congratulated them for "acting like grown-ups".

By 1971, with soldiers on the campuses and their city covered in smog, even the most commercially minded Beach Boy knew that a cool car and a bushy-bushy blonde hairdo wasn't going to make it any more. But how to address this new America? While Brian Wilson continued to struggle with the psychic/musical fallout from the unfinished business of *Smile*, the remaining members of the band pondered how to reconcile relevance and their own essentially innocent nature in a world more complicated than any they had previously tried to sing about.

Their methods varied. Pitched between Brian compositions, the social engagement encouraged by manager Jack Rieley, and the by now customarily devastating contribution of Bruce Johnston, this is an album of strange bedfellows. There are political and social issues; ecology, nostalgia and motivational instruction – the trippy and bubbling mode that Carl cooks up for the lovely "Feel Flows" and "Long Promised Road".

It's an album on which, lyrically, Van Dyke's much-discussed columnated ruins finally domino, but also where Brian rubs avocado oil into his feet. Al Jardine feels sympathy for the poor in a number – "Lookin' At Tomorrow (A Welfare Song)" – that's apparently too slight even to merit a Wikipedia page. "Student Demonstration Time" finds noted proponent of Transcendental Meditation Mike Love rewriting John Lennon's "Revolution" in the style of a spokesman for the National Rifle Association.

And yet *Surf's Up*, a record with more funny noises than you might think on an LP with a cover that dark, effortlessly crests these tonal problems like a master of the swell. Originally slated to be called *Landlocked* (these days, a bootleg with this title collects various early-'70s studio cuts), the band made a smarter call with a double entendre. Water remained everywhere for The Beach Boys, as it did for the Ancient Mariner – just not in quite the way they were used to.

Something in that water had changed. Several months before, *Sunflower* closed with Brian's beautiful "Cool, Cool Water", a refugee from *Smile*, which embraced water as pastime, aesthetic spectacle and beverage. In the few months since, The Beach Boys had turned to realism, and actively now advised – for ecological and health reasons – staying out of the ocean. Mike Love and Al Jardine's opener "Don't Go Near The Water" raises the red flag to warn that ecological times have changed.

So too, they seem to be saying, have The Beach Boys. In all sorts of ways, the simple and joyous life they once proposed may no longer be possible for anyone. What of future generations, the children? The wordless vocal harmony with mandolin and harmonica which ends the song is a 39-second epitaph for innocent days.

The harder they swim against it in their crisis of confidence, however, the more the ocean pulls them back

into its metaphorical power. Late in the album, Brian's "'Til I Die" (a song which will feature in many people's revelatory Beach Boys moments) is a cosmic wake-up call of breathtaking beauty and melancholy. In it Wilson ponders the ill-matched symbiosis of his relationship with the sea: the one an elemental force, the other an insignificant cork bobbing on the waves.

OCCASIONALLY, it will be an outsider who most lucidly grasps a dilemma, and so it is on *Surf's Up*. Since 1967, Bruce Johnston had roamed the world as an ersatz Brian Wilson, offering vocal harmonies, superb public relations skills and an occasional drop-dead composition for the group – as he had done lately with "Tears In The Morning".

Here, his song "Disney Girls (1957)" falls after Al and Brian's comic "Take A Load Off Your Feet", and nails the album's bittersweet nostalgia. It presents a cascade of museum-quality American images, from a national family album. It alludes to old money and middle-class life: from listening to pop music ("*Patti Page and summer days, on old Cape Cod*") to "*makin' wine in my garage*", and ultimately imagines a domestic contentment more idyllic than in any movie. It's no gritty documentary, but Bruce gets the point, as maybe not every Beach Boy does, that a song doesn't always need to be. "*Reality...*" he sings enticingly, the true essence of the group, "*It's not for me...*"

The album's big finish is a trio of Brian songs, less willing to retreat into an idyllic past. "A Day In The Life Of A Tree" fuses ecology, psychic vulnerability and legacy. "'Til I Die" illustrates how Brian is still capable of spectacular compositions, reconciled to their tiny place in

THE BAND HAD TURNED TO REALISM AND NOW ADVISED STAYING OUT OF THE OCEAN

a philosophically and geographically wider world. It kills his soul. Hey hey hey. And again, the new Beach Boys record ends with a song from *Smile*.

A song of contradictions, "Surf's Up" took a short time to write (in Brian's sandbox, 1967) but years to finish. Its complexities are a path to simplicity, and its ornate prolixity is to the ultimate end of no more complex an image than one of children splashing in the waves. You wouldn't imagine it would have been much of a consolation to Brian Wilson in 1971, himself and his vision both seriously shaken up in transit, but like any philosophical journey, it's not been so much about the arrival as the experiences on the way.

However long it took to arrive at "Surf's Up", it provides the album with what no-one really expected it to have: a happy ending. The struggle to be something other than The Beach Boys had led The Beach Boys to some kind of reconciliation with themselves: melody, harmony, the simple joys of life by the sea. They had ventured out on the ocean, but ended up somewhere a lot like where they started out. As it was put at the end of another American classic, "boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past".

## Trackmarks SURF'S UP

1. Don't Go Near The Water ★★★★
2. Long Promised Road ★★★★
3. Take A Load Off Your Feet ★★
4. Disney Girls (1957) ★★★★
5. Student Demonstration Time ★
6. Feel Flows ★★★★★
7. Lookin' At Tomorrow (A Welfare Song) ★★
8. A Day In the Life Of A Tree ★★★★
9. 'Til I Die ★★★★★
10. Surf's Up ★★★★★

**Label:** Brother/Reprise
**Producer:** The Beach Boys
**Recorded:** December 1966, January 1970 and March to July, 1971 at Sunset Sound Recorders, United Western Studios, CBS Columbia Square and Brian Wilson's home studio, Los Angeles
**Personnel:** Al Jardine (vocal, guitar, banjo), Mike Love (vocals, tambourine), Carl Wilson (guitar, vocals, keys), Brian Wilson (vocals, keys), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums), Bruce Johnston (vocals)
**Additional musicians:** Daryl Dragon (guitar, keys), Van Dyke Parks (vocals), Jack Rieley (vocals)
**Highest chart position:** UK 15, US 29

RELEASED: AUGUST 27, 2021

# FEEL FLOWS

## THE SUNFLOWER & SURF'S UP SESSIONS 1969–1971

**High tide! A motherlode of unreleased recordings reveal even greater depths to The Beach Boys' engaged, post-*Smile* classics.** BY ROB HUGHES

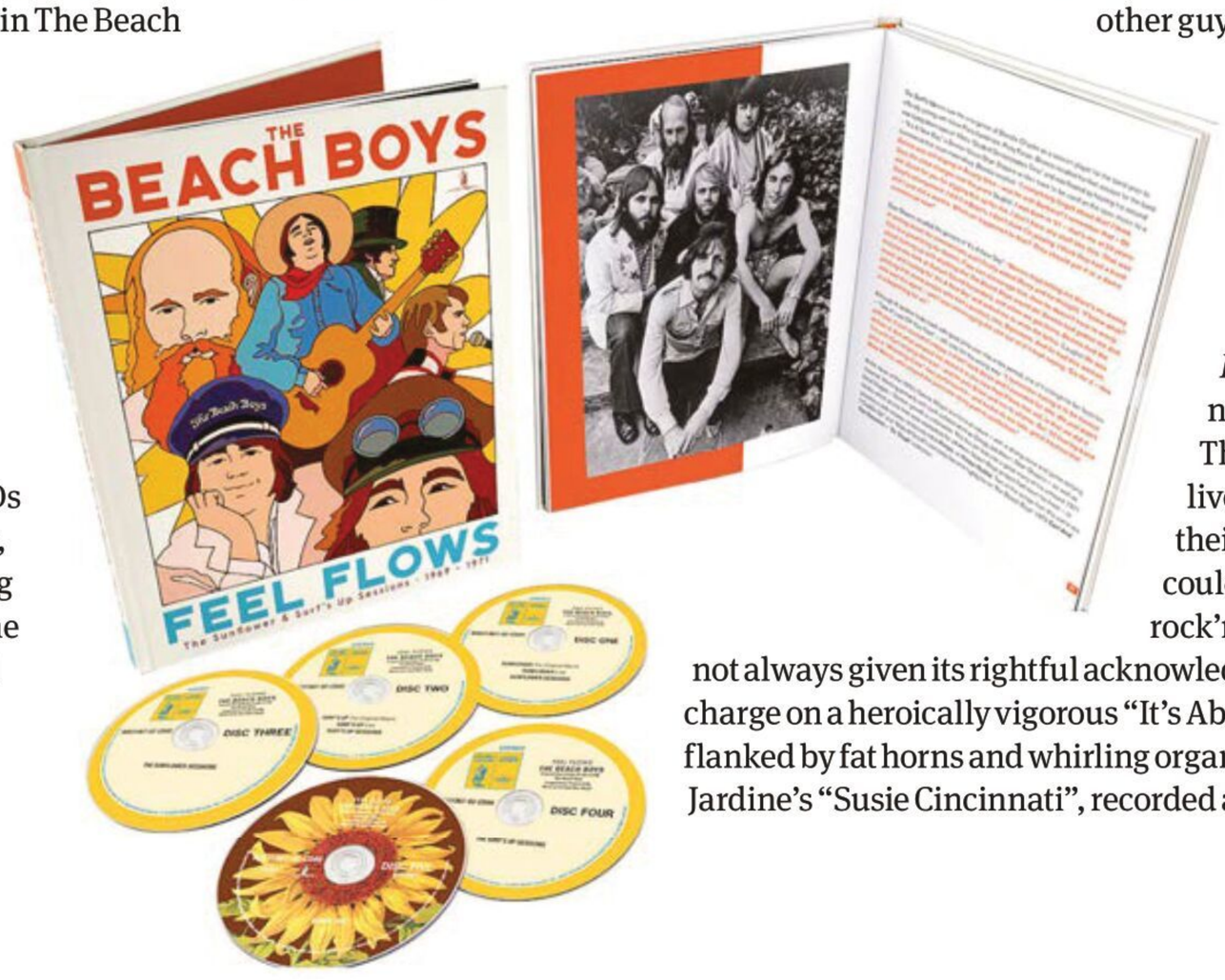
ON 15 AUGUST 1970, The Beach Boys repaired to Brian Wilson's house in Bel-Air, setting up in the studio downstairs. *Sunflower*, their new album, was due out in a fortnight, but the band were already sketching ideas for a follow-up. Wilson laid down a basic track for "'Til I Die", a song he'd been struggling with for some time but was yet to perfect. Mike Love, meanwhile, unveiled the quietly rapturous "Big Sur".

Trailed in June 2021 ahead of *Feel Flows* – a major compilation centred around *Sunflower* and its 1971 successor, *Surf's Up* – "Big Sur" finds the band in their preferred milieu: hymning the glory of a California that's part real and part fantasy, where crimson sunsets are followed by dutiful golden dawns and bubbling mountain springs feed inexorably into the ocean. A less mellifluous version of the song would surface as the opening section of *Holland*'s "California Saga" in 1973, but the original is far more persuasive. Much bootlegged but widely unavailable until now, its belated appearance teased the possibility of a trove of hidden revelations within The Beach Boys' catalogue.

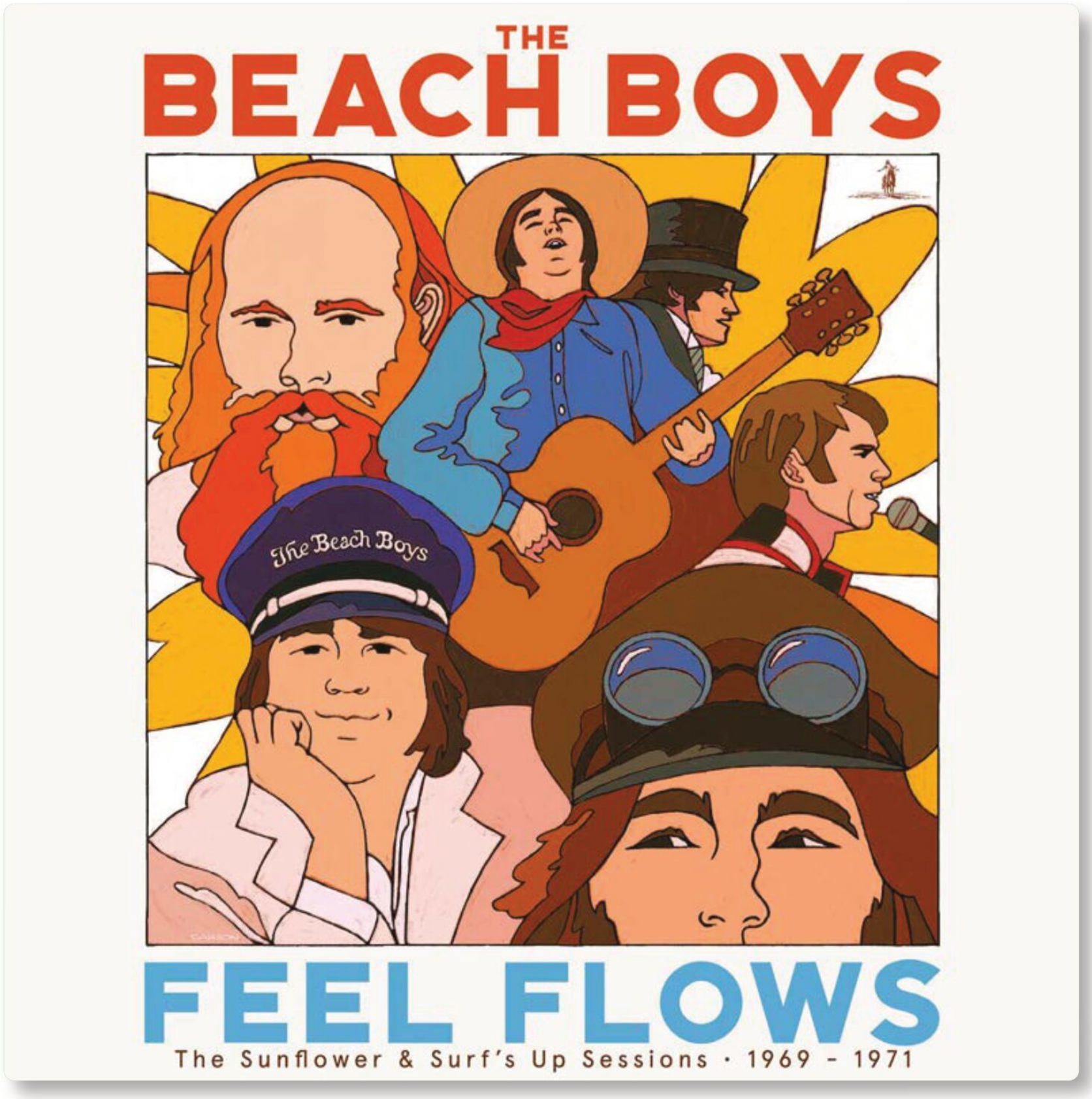
*Feel Flows* makes good on that promise. Produced by Mark Linett and archive manager Alan Boyd – the capable hands who delivered 2011's *The Smile Sessions* – it's a set as vast as it is remarkable, containing no fewer than 135 tracks, 108 of which have never been officially released before. They're strung across five CDs – various live cuts, outtakes, demos, alternate mixes and isolated backing tracks that show the full extent of The Beach Boys' endeavours at a critical point in their history.

The tragedy back then, as the late '60s gave way to a new decade, was that most people had stopped listening to The Beach Boys. After a string of dismal-selling albums, Capitol showed no interest in extending their contract beyond 1969. And Jimi Hendrix's tart assessment of the band as a "psychedelic barbershop quartet" confirmed the suspicion – certainly among those who still only equated The Beach Boys with sand, sun and breakers – that they just weren't made for these heavier, more socio-political times.

Released with the full co-operation of the surviving members, *Feel Flows* attempts to finally lay waste a tired myth. The Beach Boys were brimming with ideas for *Sunflower*, each member spurred by a new sense of artistic liberation. Brian Wilson was slowly returning to action after the psychic collapse that followed the aborted *Smile* sessions, though he would never again be the dominant force that had captained *Pet Sounds*. "Brian probably knew he couldn't make a whole album at that point," says Bruce Johnston in Howie Edelson's comprehensive liner notes for *Feel Flows*. "So we got the best out of Brian and also discovered the other guys in the band could write. And it was interesting. It had a lot of textures as far as the songs, the voices, the leads."




Rooted in remastered versions of *Sunflower* and *Surf's Up*, *Feel Flows* stakes a number of claims. The accompanying live tracks prove that, at their best, The Beach Boys could be a pretty formidable rock'n'roll band, an attribute not always given its rightful acknowledgement. Carl leads the charge on a heroically vigorous "It's About Time", from 1971, flanked by fat horns and whirling organ. The same applies to Al Jardine's "Susie Cincinnati", recorded at an Anaheim show in




DENNIS WILSON REVEALS HIMSELF AS ARGUABLY THE TRUE STAR OF *FEEL FLOWS*

1976 during the Brian's Back! campaign, marking the eldest Wilson's return to the live stage. Meanwhile, a 1972 rendition of "Long Promised Road" is nothing short of majestic, as is a Carl-steered "Surf's Up", which sacrifices some of Brian's studio delicacy for a jazzier kind of ebb and flow. Carl's creative awakening is a key aspect of *Feel Flows*, beginning with "Long Promised Road" and the title track, both written with Beach Boys manager Jack Rieley. He emerges as a fine musician too, but it's his capacity as an arranger and producer that guides the band's aesthetic. Brian had a point when he called the youngest Wilson brother "the spirit of The Beach Boys".

That said, it's Dennis Wilson who reveals himself as arguably the true star of *Feel Flows*. Having partially filled the Brian void on 1969's *20/20*, *Sunflower* saw him reconcile the twin poles of his songwriting with the vivaciously rocking "Slip On Through" and the sensitive "Forever". Here, on disc five, are the gorgeous remnants of a lost solo project, tentatively titled 'Poops/Hubba Bubba'. Co-written in 1971 with Daryl Dragon, later to find fame as one half of Captain & Tennille, Dennis's songs achieve a new kind of elevation. "Behold The Night" is a harpsichord ballad pitched between anguish and longing, all the more striking for its understated elegance. "Old Movie (Cuddle Up)" was revamped for the following year's *Carl And The Passions – "So Tough"*, but is much more effective as a wordless chorale, joined by the similarly blissful "Hawaiian Dream". But it's the crystalline, piano-led Medley: "All Of My Love/Ecology" and "Before" (the latter punctured by distorted guitar) that signify his unbound talent, both serving to foreshadow the wounded, soulful beauty of 1977's *Pacific Ocean Blue*, Dennis's solo debut.

UNSURPRISINGLY, given its sheer size, *Feel Flows* also makes room for a fair share of curiosities. Disc two closes with a cloying cover of "Seasons In The Sun", produced by Al Jardine and Terry Jacks at Brian's house in the summer of 1970. Never mind that Jacks would turn it into a huge solo hit a few years down the line. Here, sequenced together with Love's "Big Sur" and Dennis's "Sound Of Free", it feels like The Beach Boys are merely slumming it. The decidedly odd "My Solution", also from the *Surf's Up* sessions, makes its bow too. Recorded on Halloween night, it finds Brian going full Vincent Price, playing the mad scientist over descending chords and various sound effects. "Sweet And Bitter", sung by Mike Love, is more intriguing but equally strange, essentially a healthy living manual with a jokey plug for the Radiant Radish, Brian's short-lived grocery store in West Hollywood.

Particularly engaging are the alternative takes. A stretched-out version of the august "'Til I Die", with a lingering bass and vibraphone intro, attempts to inject Brian's existential crisis with a misplaced feelgood factor. No longer is he lost on the ocean or perishing in a valley. Instead, he declares, "*I found my way*". By contrast, a sparser take on "Surf's Up" (only one of several variants on offer throughout) only accentuates its allusive vulnerability.

*Feel Flows* is emphatic proof that The Beach Boys never stopped making sublime, artful, spiritually invested music, no matter how far they'd fallen in popular opinion. Post-*Pet Sounds*, the incentive, as Al Jardine observes, was "to find a way to move on beyond 'Good Vibrations'. That was the pinnacle." In that context, *Sunflower* and *Surf's Up* represent their second great peak.

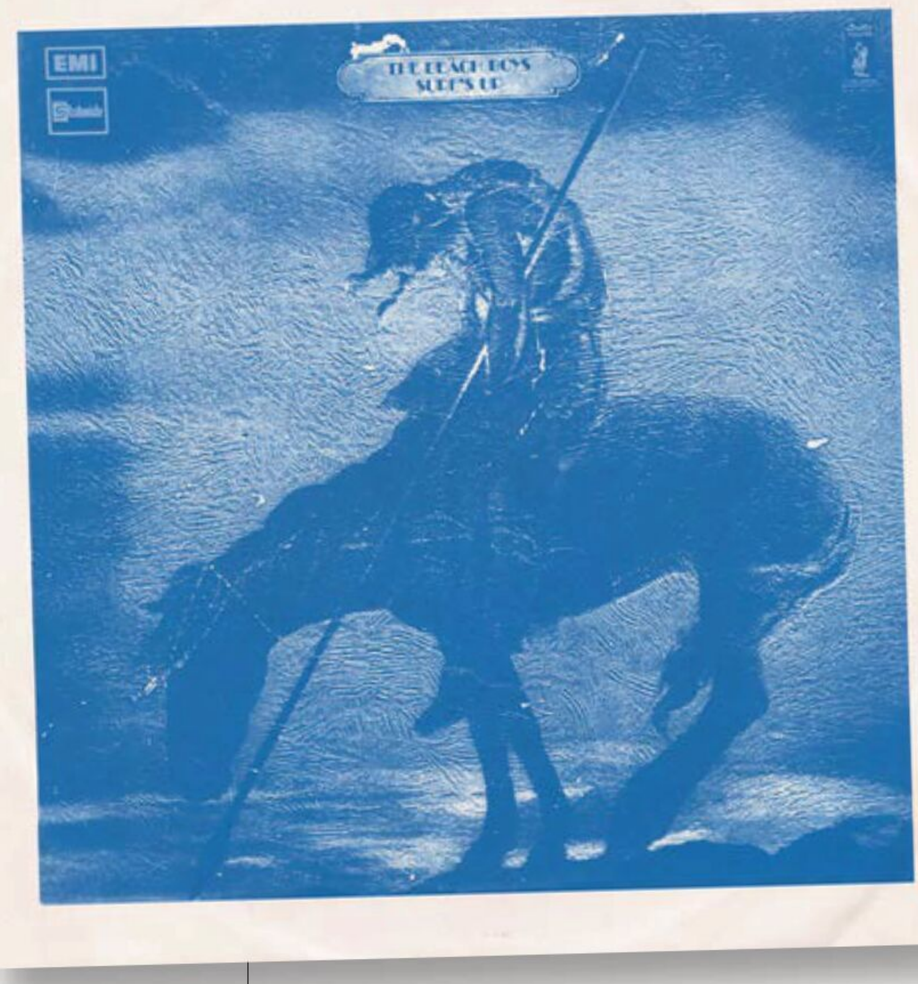
## Trackmarks SURF'S UP

**DISC ONE**
**Sunflower**
Original album, live tracks, bonus tracks
**DISC TWO**
**Surf's Up**
Original album, live tracks, bonus tracks
**DISC THREE**
**Sunflower**
1969–1970 A Cappella
**DISC FOUR**
**Surf's Up**
Sessions, A Cappella, bonus tracks
**DISC FIVE**
**Bonus Disc**

**Label:** Capitol/UME
**Producer:** The Beach Boys
**Recorded:** November 4, 1966 – November 26, 1993
**Personnel:** Al Jardine (vocal, guitar, banjo), Mike Love (vocals, tambourine), Carl Wilson (guitar, vocals, keys), Brian Wilson (vocals, keys), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums), Bruce Johnston (vocals)
**Additional musicians:** Daryl Dragon (guitar, keys), Van Dyke Parks (vocals), Jack Rieley (vocals)
**Highest chart position:** UK 19, US 83

# "Brian was still in recovery mode"

...But without him, the show goes on. Key members of the Beach Boys recall the making of their ecological 1970 classic "Don't Go Near The Water". "We'd already been through some pretty remarkable musical transformations," Mike Love tells **ROB HUGHES**




**UNCUT** JANUARY 2022

NO-ONE could miss the irony of The Beach Boys telling people to avoid the ocean. Having been routinely trumpeted by Capitol as America's leading surf group throughout the '60s, they entered the new decade with a more apprehensive worldview. "Don't Go Near The Water", the opening track of 1971's smartly titled *Surf's Up*, sought to address the growing issue of global pollution, not least in the waters off their beloved California. "It was all about being aware of your environment," explains co-writer and lead singer Mike Love. "Leave it in a better condition than you find it. That's the message."

"Don't Go Near The Water" arrived against a wider backdrop of Vietnam and civil protest in the United States. "Society was changing so quickly," says Bruce Johnston. "There had been terrible riots at places like Kent State University in Ohio, where people were shot, and trouble at the Chicago Democratic Convention too. We were still young guys at that time –I don't think any of us were even 30 years old – and all of it filtered into our songwriting."

Just as the song captured the turbulent shifts of the times, so The Beach Boys were undergoing their own difficult evolution. Songwriter Brian Wilson was still recovering from the breakdown that had followed the abandoned *SMiLE* project several years earlier, leaving a creative void that was gradually filled by his younger brothers Carl and Dennis, plus fellow band members Love, Johnston and Al Jardine.

Recorded at Brian Wilson's home studio in Bel-Air, "Don't Go Near The Water" – which appears on the *Feel Flows: The Sunflower And Surf's Up Sessions 1969–1971* boxset [*No 2 in our Archive Albums Of The Year*] – was largely devised by Jardine, who burnished the song's disarming melody with weird aquatic piano effects and a gorgeous coda featuring wordless Beach Boys harmonies, distorted banjo and muted harmonica. The effect was quietly breathtaking in its simplicity.

It also found Jardine taking a vocal bridge that earned him praise from America's most revered weekly. "I got a write-up in *Time* magazine," he recalls. "This was a big solo for me, because at the time I hadn't done very many vocal solos. But they quoted the lyric: '*Toothpaste and soap will make our oceans a bubble bath/So let's avoid an ecological aftermath*'. They thought that was terrific and wanted to shine a light on that. And it was true. You'd see pollution everywhere, suds in the lakes and streams. It's still a pretty important song. In fact, I'd like to record it again."

> **"THERE WAS A REAL PROBLEM WITH PHOSPHATES IN THE SOAP INDUSTRY IN THE UNITED STATES"**
> AL JARDINE

**AL JARDINE:** I was reading articles about the environment at the time and there was a real problem with phosphates in the soap industry in the United States. They were getting into the waterways and making it difficult to get good drinking water.

**MIKE LOVE:** The environment wasn't such a mainstream issue back then, but Al and I were both very concerned about what was happening. And that led to the creation of the song. "*Don't go near the water/ To do it any wrong*" was the message we wanted to get across.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Into the green out of the blue: The Beach Boys sans Brian, 1971

The 1972–78 lineup, during Bruce Johnston's official hiatus

**BRUCE JOHNSTON:** In those days, things were changing and people were starting to think about pollution. We'd had the worst oil spill you've ever seen in 1969 [*the Santa Barbara oil spill*], which was all over the news. Living in California, that's part of what we were all worried about. I think Al was our first environmentalist in The Beach Boys. He got into it. Mike wasn't far behind him, but Al was the guy looking to get out of the big city. And he actually did go and live the dream.

**JARDINE:** I got a little weary of looking at the smog. I happened to live right at the level, almost the exact altitude, of where smog began. And it ruined the view of the Los Angeles basin, with this brown haze hanging over everybody's houses. It was not a pleasant sight. I just couldn't take it.

**JOHNSTON:** Al was probably living up in Big Sur by the time he started writing "Don't Go Near The Water". Some people were just writing their lives.

**JARDINE:** The song took about 10 minutes to write. It was a case of just sitting down and making it happen. The hard part was getting the lyrics.

**LOVE:** The melody's pretty simple, and I remember Al came up with that bridge part: "*Toothpaste and soap will make our oceans a bubble bath*". I remember writing quite a bit of the verses, so it was a collaboration. But it didn't take all that long. It wasn't a Beethoven symphony, just a little pop tune.

**JARDINE:** It's nice to write with somebody, rather than do it all yourself. And Mike just happened to be hanging around in the studio that day. We were all coalescing at that time, trying to make it a regular thing to go into the studio and work together. Before that, when Brian was around more, he probably would've been the lyricist.

**LOVE:** The Maharishi had taught Transcendental Meditation to several of us in Paris in December '67. Then I went out to India to study with him, along with The Beatles, which was an enormous life experience. It helped steer me through the more negative stuff that impacted many groups at that time and also started to affect my songwriting. It gave me a different perspective. I think "Don't Go Near The Water" was all part of that.

**JOHNSTON:** There were so many changes happening in the band at that time. Brian was just so out of energy, out of breath, deflated. He was still in recovery mode, I think, after whatever he went through with *Smile*. And he really liked the fact that his two brothers and the rest of the band discovered that they could write music. Also, having a studio at his house meant that he didn't have to get into a car and drive into Hollywood any more. He didn't want to do anything like that, so it was quite convenient and comfortable for him to record at his place. Brian would be in and out of the studio and wouldn't produce every track, so you had different tones of the band in terms of writing, singing and production.

**LOVE:** In the late '60s, Capitol had still been promoting The Beach Boys as the No 1 surfing group in the USA. But at the same time as they were saying that, we'd already been through some remarkable musical transformations. For example, "Good Vibrations" is a long way from "Surf City". Society was changing, too. There were student demonstrations, racial unrest and the Vietnam War was escalating, with people of our age concerned about their draft status. Carl was drafted and actually had to claim that he was a conscientious objector, because they wanted to have him show up for boot camp. So there was all that backdrop and it did absolutely affect us, both philosophically and musically. The music we were making was quite a remarkable departure from what we had been doing before. It was a real evolution. We were making these transitions and there were a lot of other writing talents coming through in the band – Bruce, Dennis, Carl and Alan.

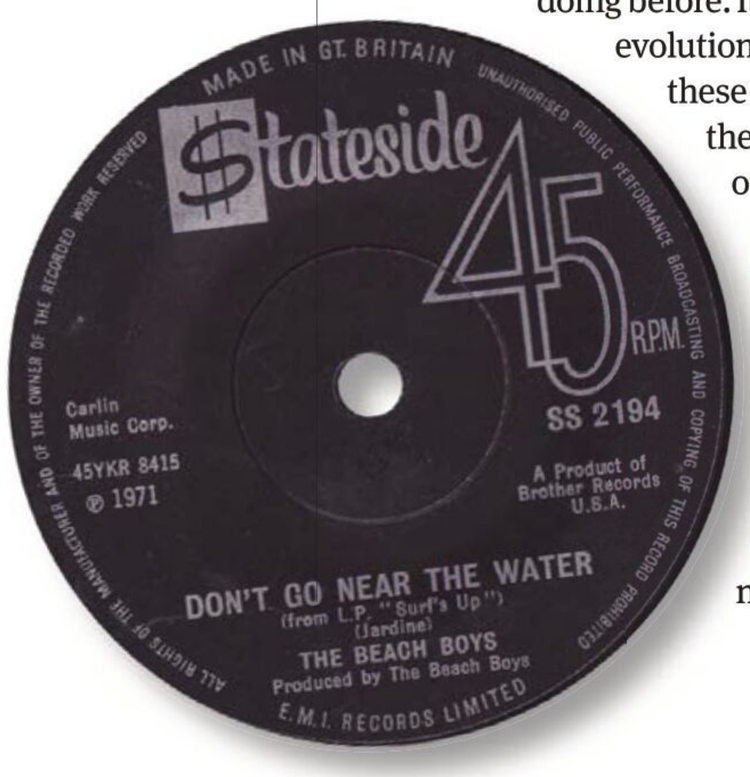
**JARDINE:** Brian was still involved, but just not in a dominant

## Key Players

**Al Jardine**
Vocals, guitar, piano, banjo, co-writer, co-producer

**Mike Love**
Lead vocals, tambourine, co-writer, co-producer

**Bruce Johnston**
Vocals, co-producer




RB/REDFERNS, BOBBY BANK/WIREIMAGE, SLAVEN VLASIC/GETTY IMAGES, PAUL ARCHULETA/GETTY IMAGES

"There was a lot of different artistry": (l–r) Johnston, Carl Wilson, Jardine and Love, 1971

way. It was more of a supporting cast role. I remember his living room being a small area where we could basically set up just enough equipment to have a little rhythm section. [*Session player and later one half of Captain & Tennille*] Daryl Dragon helped me on piano with "Don't Go Near The Water". I came up with these kind of atonal chords to make it sound weird and kind of distressed. But he really encouraged me and helped formulate the production. I have a feeling he played bass on it too, because he was a really good player. He also helped with the outro, which is majestic. That was a whole different section and was my tribute to the great Stephen Foster. I love that stuff, like "Swanee River" and those wonderful riverboat songs. We had a flanger on the banjo, which gave it that real twangy sound. So it was primarily myself and Daryl doing the production, then bringing in the guys for the vocals later.

**JOHNSTON:** I came in to sing backing vocals with the others. "Don't Go Near The Water" shows that Al Jardine is one of the great voices in The Beach Boys. I know Mike sings lead, but Al's part is absolutely killer.

**JARDINE:** Mike was chosen to be the singer – and I don't really know why at this point. It turned out he just wanted to sing it, though his phrasing was a little bit stilted. It's personal, but I actually prefer Brian's phrasing on one of the outtakes. He always had a way of phrasing things a little better than the rest of us. He just has this innate talent for everything: arrangement, production, the lot. But I think too much stuff was piling up on him at that point in time. When it came to doing the album [*Surf's Up*], Carl and Bruce and I had to kind of pick up the reins and complete a lot of unfinished songs. And that was liberating.

**LOVE:** I think the strength of the album comes from the sheer diversity, depth and breadth of writing talent that we all shared. There was a lot of different artistry.

**JARDINE:** We had "Don't Go Near The Water" and other new songs, but I'd also seen Brian's "Surf's Up" sitting in a pile of tapes and thought, 'We've got to finish this, we can't just let this languish.' Carl agreed and thought that he could help finish the vocals that Brian wouldn't sing any more. It was an enormous task. We had 12-hour mixdowns on that one, from sun up to sundown, that kind of thing. Just trying to get the darn sounds right. And we had to build our own echo chamber. But I thought we were on an amazingly good track with the water theme and everything else.

**LOVE:** About a year or so later [*May 1972*] we actually shot a video of us playing "Don't Go Near The Water" at the beach in Brighton, of all places. We did it on a cold, dreary day. It was freezing! But we needed to get it done and we were on tour in England at the time.

**JARDINE:** We did a video? My God, I don't even remember it! No kidding. The only thing I do remember about shooting in England is doing "Sloop John B" in a rowboat on the Thames.

**LOVE:** "Don't Go Near The Water" is still relevant, because global warming and all the concern about the environment just goes on and on, decade after decade. I'm not sure how much is being done about it, but we were singing about it 40 years ago.

**JOHNSTON:** I was a surf guy, still am to this day. Mike Love and I are two of the many founders of a non-profit organisation called the Surfrider Foundation, working against pollution in oceans and on beaches. So we've had an awareness of issues with water for a long time now. It's part of our lives.

**JARDINE:** There is something else about "Don't Go Near The Water", which I only discovered when we were going through the outtakes for *Feel Flows* – Brian recorded an extra verse. Of course, because we were working in the living-room studio in Brian's house, he could do pretty much whatever he wanted after we'd all gone home, so he was moonlighting. I laughed so hard when I first heard it. Brian was such a practical joker and still is. There's always been a little side of him that's just trying to get to you in some funny way, poke you in the ribs with a little humour. This one was a little different though. He sings: "*Don't go near the water/Don't you think it's sad?/Don't go near the water/I think it killed my dad*". I mean, that's pretty personal. But I think it's done tongue-in-cheek. The funny part is, he didn't tell the rest of us. Or maybe he didn't want us to know. I guess he just thought, 'I'll go down there and have some fun.' Maybe the engineer happened to have that tape sitting on the console. I just wish he would've called me at two in the morning, when he did that verse, then we could've had him sing the lead. Only with the right lyrics!

**"SOMETHING ELSE I JUST DISCOVERED – BRIAN RECORDED AN EXTRA VERSE"**
AL JARDINE

## Fact File

**Written by:** Al Jardine and Mike Love
**Recorded at:** Beach Boys Studio, Los Angeles
**Produced by:** The Beach Boys
**Personnel:** Mike Love (lead vocals, tambourine), Al Jardine (vocals, guitar, piano, banjo), Brian Wilson (vocals, harmonica), Bruce Johnston (vocals), Carl Wilson (vocals, tambourine), Dennis Wilson (vocals), Daryl Dragon (Moog, keys, bass), Mike Kowalski (drums)
**Released:** August 30, 1971
**Highest chart position:** US 29; UK 15

## Timeline

**AUGUST 31,1970:** The Beach Boys release *Sunflower*, their first LP for Warners/Reprise after nearly a decade with Capitol. It's the worst-selling album of their career thus far
**JANUARY 1971:** After a successful residency at the Whisky A Go Go, the band begins sessions for a new album, provisionally titled 'Landlocked', later renamed *Surf's Up*
**APRIL 3, 1971:** "Don't Go Near The Water" is recorded, along with fellow *Surf's Up* highlight "Long Promised Road" and Dennis Wilson outtake "4th Of July"
**AUGUST 30, 1971:** *Surf's Up* is released, peaking at No 15 in the UK. That November, "Don't Go Near The Water" is issued as the B-side of "Surf's Up" in the US, but fails to chart. In the UK it's backed by "Student Demonstration Time", with similar results

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: MAY 15, 1972

# CARL AND THE PASSIONS "SO TOUGH"

**You need a mess of help... Brian retreats again, as two new members join the ranks. Results: mixed.** BY MARK BENTLEY

**Critics' Verdict**

**"There is a lot of spirit and it's reflected in the lyrics. Especially as Mike and Alan are now teachers of Transcendental Meditation."**

NME, JUNE 10, 1972

PRODUCTION TEAM, MATERIAL, time, place, personnel... a great album is always more than the sum of its parts, and huge talents are quite capable of making hugely disappointing records. Think *From Dusty With Love*, the forgotten follow-up to *Dusty In Memphis*, recorded at Sigma Sound Studios in Philadelphia in late 1969, and written and produced by Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff. Add in Wings' *Wild Life*, The Stone Roses' *Second Coming*, that George Clinton-produced Chili Peppers album... Let's be honest: these records are let-downs, best described as "partially successful", rock-critic shorthand for "save your money".

This is the company *Carl And The Passions "So Tough"* keeps, dwarfed as it is by an imposing predecessor, *Surf's Up*, and a mercurial follow-up, *Holland*. It arrived in a period of transition, and what seemed like greater autonomy for the band. Recorded at Brian's home studio in LA, it was the first Beach Boys album to be released after a new distribution deal with Warners, and the first to feature two suspiciously talented new members: Ricky Fataar and Blondie Chaplin of South African rockers The Flames.

The full album title is a clue to a shift in leadership, too, musically at least. *Carl And The Passions* is a sentimental nod to the youngest Wilson's first teenage band, and it was Carl who moved to bring in these new recruits, who offered new material and a rootsier, even homespun sound. A supposed sense of boyish, all-for-one innocence is captured by a cute sleevenote: "Thanks to Alan's mom for renting us the bass fiddle on the first session."

In reality, though, the whole axis of the band was tilting. As Keith Altham's revealing contemporary interviews (reprinted on page 78) demonstrate, here was a group falling out of love with itself. Bruce Johnston's dissatisfaction with the band's direction, his apparent frustration with Brian and manager Jack Rieley, and subsequent dismissal/departure (delete as appropriate) caused series fracture: "I'm not happy with what's happened," said Mike Love, with acidic understatement. Meanwhile Dennis had put his hand through a plate glass door in summer 1971 – an accident serious enough to mean he didn't resume drumming duties until 1974.

Plus, *Carl And The Passions* has a Brian-shaped hole at its centre. Of the eight songs here, the maestro has co-writing credits on just three. The early '70s, of course, is the time of his infamous, unreleased "bedroom tapes"; endless home recordings, half-formed song fragments, experiments in ephemera. "Brian would write songs and play them for a few people in his living room, and that's the last you'd hear of them," recalled Johnston later. "He would disappear back up to his bedroom and take the song with him." Brian was also distracted by recording sessions with another band: American Spring, a new project for wife Marilyn and her sister, Honeys bandmate Diane Rovell. That restless energy was channelled elsewhere.

But it is not the material, or musicianship, or bruising backstory that undermines *So Tough*. Song-wise, there are unexpected riches within. Two delicious Dennis compositions foreshadow his solo masterpiece. Fataar and Chaplin's contributions are among the strongest here; these two had the astonishing ability to make The Beach Boys sound like a cross between Little Feat and The Band. Additional contributors here include Daryl Dragon (soon to be of Captain & Tennille) and Tandyn Almer (formerly of The Purple Gang). And somehow Al, Carl and Mike manage to out-Brian Brian with

the twisting, karmic and undeniably superb "All This Is That".

The faults are mostly technical. First: the tracklisting is bafflingly ill-considered, with all the right songs in all the wrong places. Midtempo rockers are sardined alongside other midtempo rockers – which means that when they come, the quieter moments get lost. Great records have a great running order, and a lack of judgement has fated this album to seem one-note and samey. It's the same wrongheaded thinking that allowed the tedious Rieley co-write "You Need A Mess Of Help To Stand Alone" to be selected as the lead-off single. A great title, but a forgettable trundle, the single missed the UK and US charts.

SECOND fault: the sound quality isn't great. *So Tough* sounded painfully ramshackle and muddy on its first release, a fault only partially corrected by a valiant remastering job in 2000. No amount of wizardry can repair a fundamentally poor recording, and while the remaster brings bite, treble and some clarity to the album, it also adds an uncomfortable hissiness. It makes listening to a sludgy piece of songwriting like the gospelly TM salutation "He Come Down" pretty hard work.

When it's good, though, it's excellent, and the highlights rank alongside The Beach Boys' best moments of the period. The "Do It Again"-ish "Marcella" is ace, Brian's best contribution. Chaplin and Fataar's "Here She Comes", with its rippling bassline, is a steepling piece of funky country rock. Their second effort "Hold On Dear Brother" is enjoyable, a lurching time signature and unexpected melody that recalls "Be Here In The Morning". Of the two Dennis/Daryl Dragon songs, "Make It Good" is the pick – a stately, epic weepie like *Pacific Ocean Blue*'s "Thoughts Of You". Album closer "Cuddle Up", too, is painfully, beautifully maudlin.

**THERE ARE UNEXPECTED TREASURES WITHIN; THE FAULTS ARE TECHNICAL**

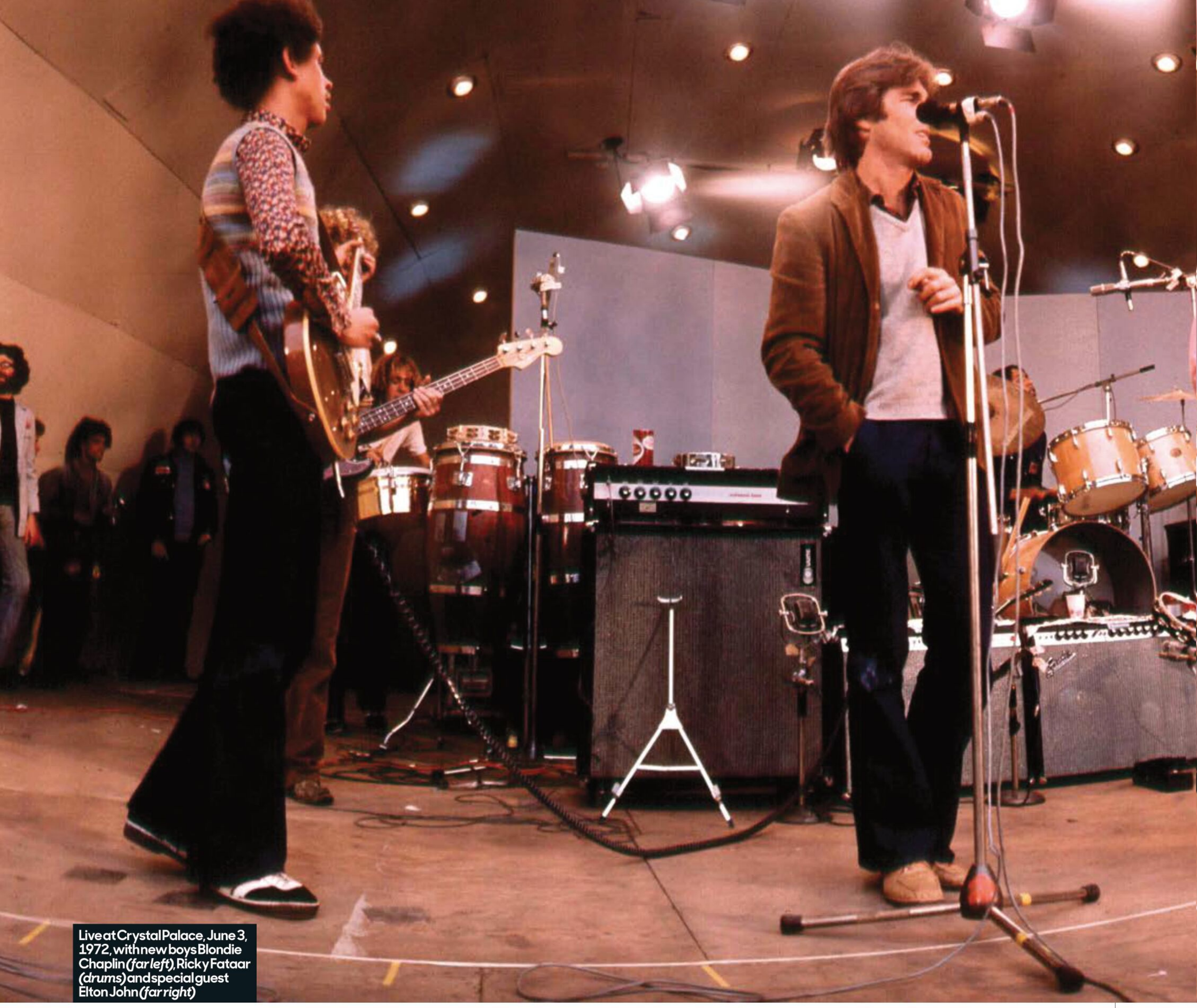
But buried away on Side Two, "All This Is That" is primetime Beach Boys, maybe the best Brian Wilson song Brian Wilson never wrote. Most obviously redolent of *Sunflower* (and a little bit of 10cc's "I'm Not In Love", oddly) it has the sunset chord changes, under-the-skin harmonies and will-o'-the-wisp melodies that lift their finest work. A Jardine/Love/C Wilson spectacular, it should have been the album's centrepiece and it should have been the single.

On its initial US release in May 1972, the album was bundled together with a reissue of *Pet Sounds* – and that gesture may underline the camp's lack of confidence in this part-work record. "I'm pleased with almost all the tracks," Mike Love told *NME*, and it's a pointed piece of criticism of an album that lacks a fundamental cohesion, inspiration and Wilsonian attention to detail.

## Trackmarks CARL AND THE PASSIONS "SO TOUGH"

1. You Need A Mess Of Help To Stand Alone ★★
2. Here She Comes ★★★★★
3. He Come Down ★★
4. Marcella ★★★
5. Hold On Dear Brother ★★★★
6. Make It Good ★★★★
7. All This Is That ★★★★★
8. Cuddle Up ★★★

**Label:** Brother/Reprise
**Produced:** The Beach Boys
**Recorded:** December 4, 1971 to April 13, 1972 at Brian Wilson's home studio, Los Angeles
**Personnel:** Blondie Chaplin (vocals, guitars), Ricky Fataar (vocals, drums), Al Jardine (vocals), Bruce Johnston (vocals), Mike Love (vocals), Brian Wilson (vocals), Carl Wilson (vocals), Dennis Wilson (vocals)
**Additional musicians:** Daryl Dragon (keys), unknown (keys, fiddle, zither, slide guitar)
**Highest chart position:** UK 25, US 50



Live at Crystal Palace, June 3, 1972, with new boys Blondie Chaplin *(far left)*, Ricky Fataar *(drums)* and special guest Elton John *(far right)*

# "There's no room to to harbour any ill feeling. The group is like a marriage."

Mike Love, paterfamilias of America's oldest rock'n'roll band on the road, introduces a new, mature Beach Boys. With the arrival of Blondie Chaplin and Ricky Fataar there is, apparently, "a broader spectrum of ability". Harder rock, and Transcendental Meditation, are on the agenda, he tells **KEITH ALTHAM**. And Brian? "His things are so oblique..."

RB/REDFERNS

**NME** JUNE 10 AND 17, 1972

THE BEACH BOYS are the most successful and oldest working rock'n'roll band on the road today and this is a crucial year in their evolution. There are important new influences and new personnel in the band who are bringing about a major musical facelift, although they are not forsaking their early surfing glories – rather re-evaluating them.

Despite the onus which is carried so well by Carl onstage, it is Mike Love as the band's senior citizen who energises, administrates and proposes much of their future development.

It was to Mike I talked in his London hotel on their most recent visit about the problems they still face of formulating a policy which can carry their present beliefs and hopes before their distinguished past.

**It appears that you are now broadening the musical aspect of the group as opposed to being the world's top rock vocal group, which is where you've had the emphasis. Is that, broadly speaking, what you're doing?**

Yes, I'd say that was it. The others are tremendous instrumentalists and, of course, the voice is an instrument and they all work together. As you say, in the past with The Beach Boys it's been vocals and harmony, but now I think it's become apparent that there is a broader spectrum of ability. We can play harder rock than we've ever been able to before with Blondie and Ricky in the group. Ricky has been drumming since he was nine years old; he has more scope than Dennis, who just maintained a steady hard-beat for the vocals.

**"WE CAN PLAY HARDER ROCK THAN WE'VE EVER BEEN ABLE TO BEFORE WITH BLONDIE AND RICKY IN THE GROUP"**
MIKE LOVE

**Are you afraid that this new image might dissipate the identity The Beach Boys have built up over many years?**

No, because you can't destroy the sound we've had for so long just like that. At present, we are doing something new, but we still have some elements of harmony. Brian is still writing for the group and this is being fused with the new element of creativity within the group from the other fellas.

Dennis is into strings and orchestrations, he wants to do classical things.

**Is it possible to bring two coloured South African musicians into a group that was essentially built upon the idea of a white High School sound and still be accepted as The Beach Boys?**

Well, the High School sound was influenced by rhythm and blues: Little Richard, Chuck Berry, also people like Wilson Pickett. Even though the two fellas have a mixed racial heritage, that doesn't come into the music.

**Isn't it a contradiction to bring in Ricky and Blondie as new Beach Boys? Would it not have been better to introduce them as musicians to help expand the sound?**

We brought them in because we knew they were tremendous musicians and they could sing and perform and be an asset to The Beach Boys, and to give us a totally new look.

**Does this mean you are doing heavier rock material now?**
Not necessarily – we do heavy rock, but we also do the same delicate light things.

Before, we had limitations on what we could do musically... We couldn't do heavy rock, but now we can.

**I heard that an audience you played to recently wasn't as responsive as you might have liked... Is this due to the fact that it's difficult to get people to accept this new material?**
No, that's not true at all. We were playing at Reading on that occasion, and the audience were sitting down on the floor and they didn't start dancing until the last encore, but they were still responsive.

**Did the addition of Blondie precipitate the elimination of Bruce? Did his addition make Bruce's contribution negligible?**
No, that's not the reason.

**Did he leave of his own accord, or was he asked to leave?**
We had a meeting and we discussed the personal problems within the group, and the relationships between the various members within the group. Some of us had no relationship at all, and Bruce said, "If that's the way you feel about it maybe I should just leave – I don't want to leave, but maybe it's for the best!" It was very amicable.

Bruce is definitely on a solo trip, he is a good solo performer, he writes fantastic songs by himself, and the time he spent writing alone isolated him from the group.

He had his own interests, his own relationships with the press, and he played a game that was oblique to The Beach Boys. But now he is free to do as he pleases.

The Beach Boys never threw Bruce out, he was just on a tangent that was outside The Beach Boys for so many years. His whole idea of the future is to be a songwriter and have a TV show, and it's all based on individual musical taste and individual aspirations, which are fine, but not within the framework of a group. That was what was good about Bruce leaving the group.

**"BRUCE WAS JUST ON A TANGENT THAT WAS OUTSIDE THE BEACH BOYS FOR SO MANY YEARS"**
MIKE LOVE

**Was it not inevitable that he would be an outsider in the group because of your strong family ties and the roots to the group prior to his joining?**
I don't see that, because Ricky is very much a group-conscious person and his solo visibility and individual artistic development is going to be seen in England very soon. He is going to help in recording another group's album, in the next two weeks after the tour.

**Bruce was quoted that he was dismissed.**
Bruce said he knew the problems as well as we did, and he wanted us to help him to write this song, but each individual in the group had something that affected them about the way Bruce had been for seven years, and he said, "If that's the way you feel about it, I'll just split."

**Was it just a question of his lifestyle being different from yours?**
No, not at all, because his lifestyle is changing like everyone else's; the difference is that he is creative on his own, not as part of a group. I wouldn't dream of doing a solo album or anything like that, but that's just me.

**Has Bruce been working as a solo artist?**
No, he's been working with The Beach Boys. I'm not happy with what's happened. I'm very sentimental about the group, I've been with them for 10 years, but we're going on a whole new cycle, increased activity, increased productivity and creativity. We've been touring since March 15 with about 10 days off in which we recorded this last album. We've really been working hard. There is no room in the group to harbour any ill feeling or doubts about anyone, because the group is like a marriage, where everyone lives together. We've all had our ups and downs within the group and got frustrated and pissed off because of the tremendous amount of work that's gone into the last year or so. But when Bruce was confronted with it, he took it subjectively and he over-reacted, and said he would split. He may have taken it as a dismissal, but that's just too bad, because we had tangible gripes about him. I don't think the subject is closed, we're still friends. Creatively I don't know what's going to happen, it depends on him a lot.

He knows where we are and who we are and if he really wants to be involved with the group, either as a record company or writing, he's more than welcome and he knows it. Right now, I think he's thinking about what his next move is going to be.

**Is he part of the same legal action that is being levelled against you as a member of**

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Good vibrations: Ricky Fataar *(pedal steel)* and Blondie Chaplin *(guitar)* with Al Jardine, Mike Love and Carl Wilson, 1972

"Before, we had limitations on what we could do musically": The Beach Boys, 1972

**The Beach Boys from your previous management?**
Yes, but I'm not too worried about that law suit, because someone is lying. Within 15 minutes, this case will be thrown out of the court room.

**Is it true that with your latest album you give another one away with it?**
In the United States we've done that. We've bought the rights of five old albums to distribute them for seven years, plus *Smile*, the album that was never released.

The thing we want to do is a combination of bringing everyone up to date and giving everyone a chance to get an old collector's item that has been discontinued by the record company. Americans have to write to England if they want copies of albums like *Smiley Smile*.

So we are going to issue the new Beach Boy album and one of the old classics in a double-album set, but not to charge any more money for the old album. But in England it's coming out as a single album, because we couldn't get the rights to the old albums over here.

**Can you talk a bit about the individual tracks on the album?**
I'm pleased with almost all the tracks, Brian Wilson was there with "Marcella" and "Mess Of Help" with the vocal harmonies. "The Background Track" almost approaches a Stones kind of feel, with country guitars and violins and stuff. It's pretty funky.

**Was it done over a long period of time?**
Ten days, it was very spontaneous. Some of the tracks were done before that; it was recorded at Brian's house.

**Were some of the tracks on the album inspired by your involvement with Transcendental Meditation?**
Yes, definitely. Alan and I were in New York for two-and-a-half months studying with the Maharishi and during that time we made a few songs, two of which are on this album. One is called "All This Is That", which is a line from a basic tenet of Hinduism or Buddhism, which says: "I am that; thou are that; all this is that".

It's a philosophical expression, which relates to universal creative intelligence from which everything is made up. It is the basis of all life.

That philosophy is the background of the whole song; the lyrics are kind of illustrative of a mood or feeling of when a person meditates and takes a dive within the mind.

The song is philosophical through the lyrics and creating a mood through the music. It creates a feeling which is born of our being involved with meditation. It has a very pretty feeling. The other song is done in a gospel style, "He Come Down". On that one, we're singing like a whole black church choir and it's a lot of fun. Basically, it underscores the teachings of Jesus, Krishna and the Maharishi.

**Al wasn't into meditation last time I saw him. Is this a recent conversion?**
People get the idea that meditation is a trip, but meditation is something that you do twice a day, it's a technique that you use to unfold your mental potential, it gives you more profound thinking and more profound energy with which you can do anything. It's a way to progress and evolve yet still do your basic activity, so it's a very life-supportive thing to do.

But because of the press, Beatles etc, the whole thing becomes more of a trip, but there is far more interest in it now in the States than there was when The Beatles were into it.

Medical research is going into meditation, and a tremendous amount of facts are being revealed about the validity of meditation, so scientists, students, teachers, etc, are into meditation for valid reasons, not for the trip of meditation.

For the world of rock'n'roll and the press, it was a trip, so people were sidelined from knowing what Transcendental Meditation really is, which is 15 or 20 minutes in the morning of deep rest of the mind and body, which supports better feeling and activity during the day.

**The Beatles became disenchanted with the Maharishi, but not with meditation, which they still say is valid – why?**
Right, they recognise that one thing is a trip, and the other is not, they realise that meditation is good, but the trip that went along with it with the photographers and the Maharishi etc was not it – they realised that the Maharishi's destiny was not theirs.

**They seemed to become disenchanted with Maharishi himself, though?**
The man Maharishi is doing a role, his role is to train teachers of meditation. His whole day is geared to that. The problem was that here was a man who was totally devoted to this – here is a rock group and they meet head-on.

They gain from each other, the Maharishi gained from The Beatles what he wanted, ie, publicity – he wanted more people to be meditating. This aroused a whole interest in meditation, intellectuals tried it, and investigated it, some dropped out, some kept it up, and some got a little more interested and wanted to become teachers.

When The Beatles came back and said we're not into his scene, a lot of people may have thought it was a complete denial of the validity of meditation, but it wasn't, because they thought meditation was a good thing, but they weren't into Maharishi.

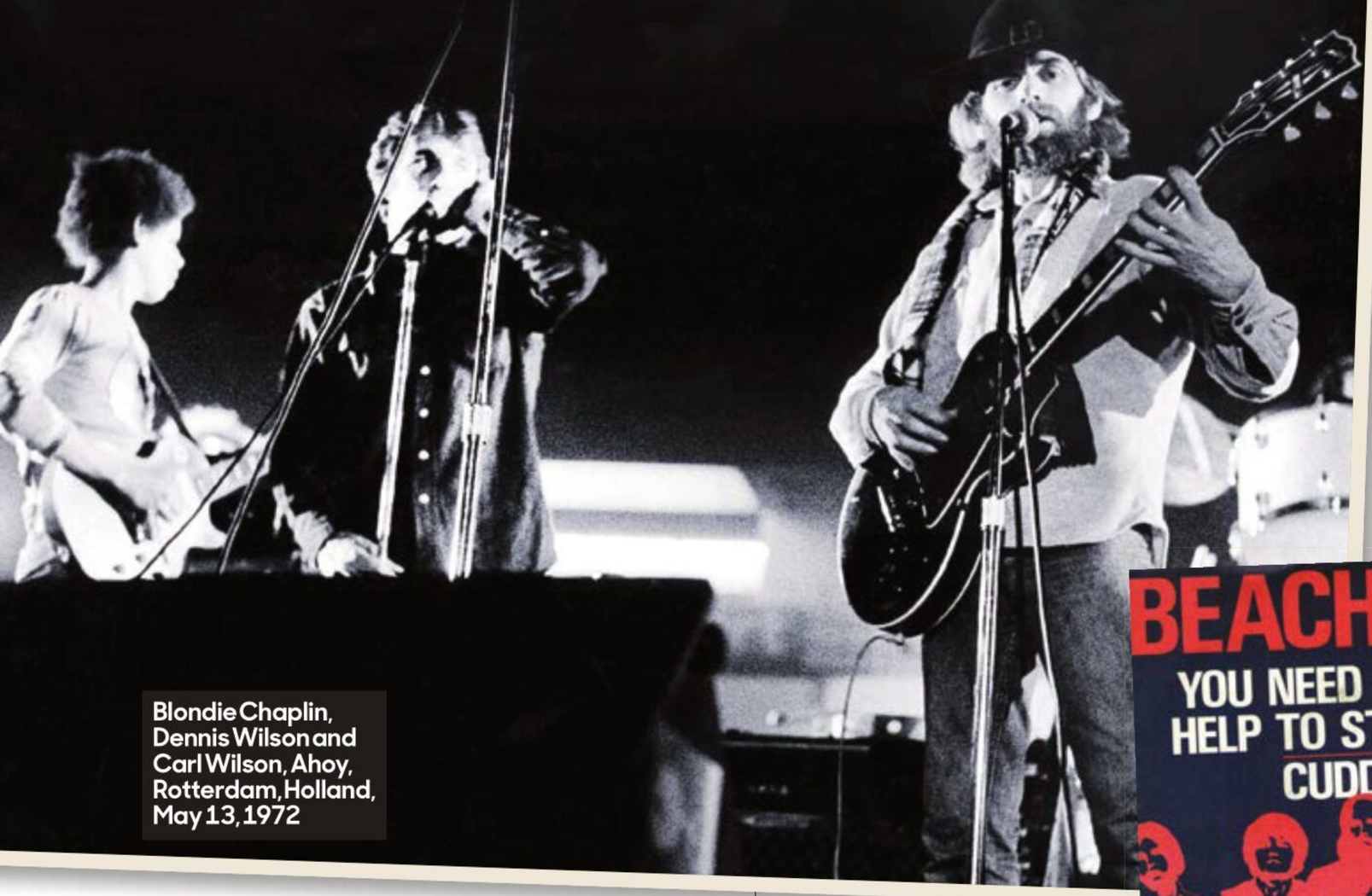
Soon, meditation will be part of the syllabus of universities all over the world. Twelve years ago, there was one teacher of meditation, now there are over 2,000. It's increased by 100 per cent each year.

When The Beatles came back from India, they went into doing Apple Records, instead of putting their careers aside to pursue meditation. So they weren't really into it.

**You obviously think it's possible to combine the teachings of the Maharishi with the work that you do musically for The Beach Boys?**
Derek Taylor just told me on the phone that George is gently nudging them all the time to learn meditation. When we went on tour in America with the Maharishi, the people just weren't ready for him. The whole thing was done in very poor taste, the promotion was wrong, but we wanted to bring him to the student population.

**Do all The Beach Boys practise meditation?**
Yes, all of them including

RB/REDFERNS



Blondie Chaplin, Dennis Wilson and Carl Wilson, Ahoy, Rotterdam, Holland, May 13, 1972

GIE KNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES

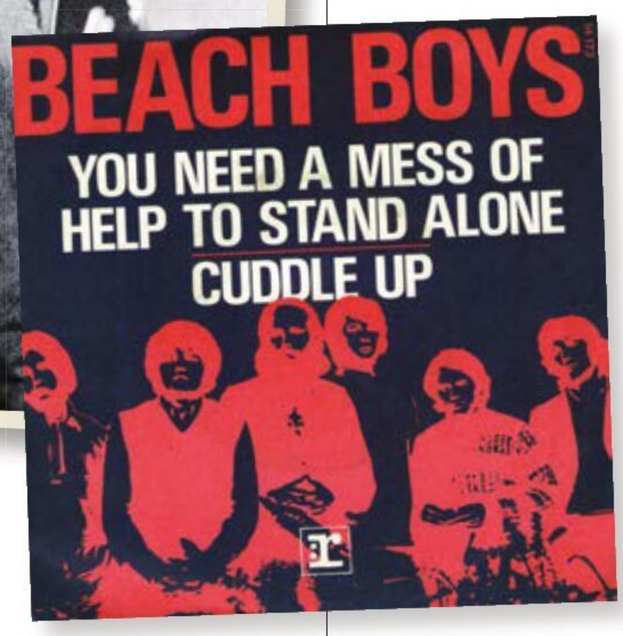
Blondie and Ricky have been initiated. Also Brian is very much in favour of meditation, sometimes he meditates more than he should and sometimes he doesn't meditate at all. He called George Harrison about a year-and a-half ago and asked him if he wanted to do a special album and TV show on meditation and George wasn't interested at the time.

**Was Bruce into meditation?**
He was initiated but he was never into it. He told me he wanted something more physical. He surfs and rides a bicycle; he likes physical discipline and not mental.

**I read a couple of weeks ago that Brian stopped touring because he thought he was ugly, and he didn't want to appear onstage because of it.**
He's shy, he always has been. He's not a performer.

**Are the songs he's working on now recent, or is he still drawing from stuff he did about four years ago?**
No, he's writing a lot. Recent ones are "Marcella" and "Mess Of Help". He's got a lot more ideas happening.

**How do you feel about "Mess Of Help" as a single?**

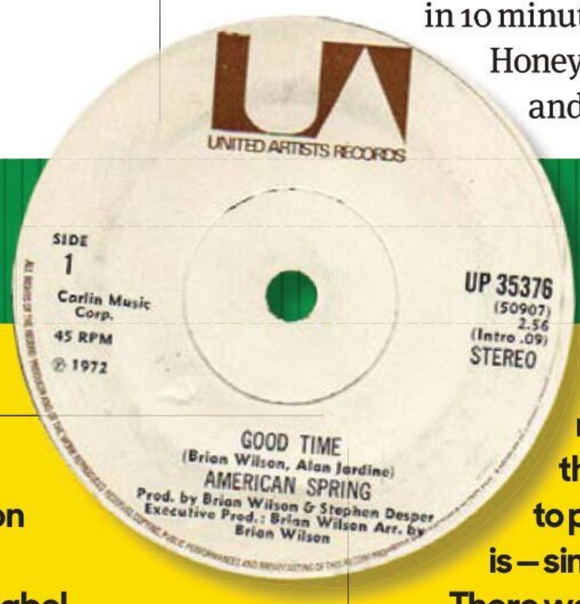



I like the track, it's one that requires a few plays to get into it. A point about a lot of Brian's things is that they are so oblique and often complex. His music is something that you have to listen to, because he'll put in subtleties that you can listen to for a year and not hear.

**There was a rapid transformation by him from the 'Beachy' things to the sophisticated intricacies of "Heroes And Villains", etc. Was this due to some kind of psychedelic upheaval in his life? He used to turn out pop tunes.**
He could do that all day, like we did "Do It Again" in 10 minutes, and "Wild Honey" was about the same and so was "Surf's Up".

# "THE BEACH BOYS ARE HIS WHOLE LIFE"

## But Brian Wilson brings tireless energy on behalf of his wife's band.




**MM** JUNE 10, 1972

BRIAN WILSON spent last week hustling. He called up radio stations, went around doing interviews, and generally radiated enthusiasm. This, you might remember, is the same Brian Wilson who shuts himself away in his room when visitors come, and who rarely emerges from his Bel-Air house.
So what's brought him out of his seclusion?

The answer is his wife, Marilyn, and her new group, Spring. Spring — to be known in Britain as American Spring to avoid confusion with a local band — consists of Marilyn and her sister, Diane, and their first album is already out in the States, containing versions of some Beach Boys favourites — "This Whole World" and "Forever" — some golden oldies, like "Everybody" and the Shirelles' "Mamma Said," a couple of less-familiar Carole King songs, and some new material by Brian — like both sides of their single, "Good Time" and Sweet Mountain".

Assessment of the record can wait, but can fairly be gauged from the fact that Brian himself had lots to do with the making of it. He's the main producer (the others are ex-Beach Boys engineer Stephen Desper and friend David Sandler), and the instrumental tracks on four songs were his work alone.

"Brian worked on them in the middle of the night, when I was in bed," says Marilyn. "You wouldn't believe some of the things he did. It was all done in our studio at home — we've taken it down now — and on one track, for the drums, he took an old guitar case and knocked it with a stick, and made a different sound come through the Moog."

MARILYN and Diane Rovell met the Wilsons nine years ago, when Marilyn was 16.

The sister and their cousin, Ginger, sang a little, and it wasn't long before Brian had written and produced their first record: "Surfin' Down The Swannee River". They were called The Honeys, and the record was on Capitol, The Beach Boys' label.

It wasn't really a hit, but they cut one more — "From Jimmy With Tears" — for the label, and then moved over to Warner Bros, where they recorded Brian's "He's A Doll" and some other equally unsuccessful singles.

Marilyn and Brian got married a year after they met, but The Honeys' career didn't finish until October of 1969, the night before Marilyn gave birth to their second baby.

The Honeys made some live appearances, including one Californian date which Marilyn recalls with special affection: "There were The Beach Boys, The Four Speeds, and The Honeys — all surfing acts. Brian's father told the boys: 'You guys, back the girls up,' and so were the first group they ever backed on stage. And the last!"

She and Diane were in the studios, laying down vocal tracks, the night before the second birth. "I was in there till four in the morning... gasping. And in the morning I had my baby just like that. My advice to pregnant women is — sing."

There was a long hiatus in Marilyn's singing career after that — until, last autumn, Diane came rushing into her house waving a tape of a song written by Carole King and Toni Stern called "Now That Everything's Been Said".

"Diane has a fantastic ear for commercial songs," says Marilyn, "and she said we should cut this song. So two days later we recorded it, with Brian, and that was the start of Spring.

"Then one of my girlfriends, who works at United Artists, liked it and took it to the company, and they signed us to do 12 sides a year for five years. We had a fantastic offer from them."

Marilyn is grateful for the opportunity to do all this not just for the benefit of her own career, but for Brian's state of mind too.

"The Beach Boys are his whole life, of course, but this is so good for him. I guess he felt guilty about all The Honeys' past bombs! He was so enthusiastic about Spring — he wanted to make it into a double album. What is there if you

**I feel it's a pity that you are forced to defend those early songs, particularly in America, because they have a value all of their own. Were they true to their time?**
When you were there last time that was true, we were going through a really bad stage, but now it's changed.

**I feel that in about 10 years' time your early songs will be regarded as vintage classics like the Chuck Berry songs are today – do you?**
They already are in a lot of ways. The awareness has developed a lot in the last year.

**I thought it was interesting that The Grateful Dead established a rapport with you.**
Things like that show that The Beach Boys are a little more universal than people might have thought. They aren't localised to surfing music. We knew that all along, but the record company didn't help us. But now things are so much more wide open and we have no complaints.

**Would you feel any embarrassment about doing those early things again onstage?**
I was thinking of doing this song called "Catch A Wave" on this tour. There are so many good songs in that catalogue that are really nice, and when we do them onstage we do them for the musical value and the performance side.

**Would you agree that the real art in pop music is to capture the sound and feel of things at that particular time so that you can look back at it in five or 10 years' time and see if it caught the essence?**
I don't know about the future. I just know that the songs we wrote were typical of the times.

**Are those old records your property or Capitol Records'?**
They are Capitol's.

**Do you feel there is any need for The Beach Boys to be reflective of 1972? Is there anything to be derived from the situation as it is now?**
We used to reflect the West Coast, but now we're international. People with families, etc, are into us now as they grew up with us and we bring back memories for them. The issues are broader now that we've grown up and matured. We've become involved in terms of the music, and intellectually and spiritually we're deeper aware. Whereas before it was Brian who was the sole creator in the group, now we all take part. Dennis, in particular, is really doing some great things. Listen to "Cuddle Up" on the new LP that he wrote. It's fantastic, it's got that romance and intimacy that's really special.

**"WE USED TO REFLECT THE WEST COAST; NOW WE'RE INTERNATIONAL. WE'VE GROWN UP AND MATURED"**
MIKE LOVE

**That sounds like a contradiction in terms of what you were just talking about.**
Well, on the one hand your perspective can be broad, you can be aware what the issues are, but that doesn't preclude you having a family or feelings or emotions. Your taste can become broader, yet you can become more refined in terms of localised values and intimate things in life, as well as appreciate more the universal tempo of life. Really, a group is a bunch of individuals and the more the group can serve the development of those individuals, the better.

I think you'll find in the next two or three years, instead of being The Beach Boys we will be Mike Love, Dennis Wilson, Al Jardine and Bruce Johnston (*Freudian slip?*).

can't make music and enjoy it, without any pressures at all? It was my husband, my sister and I just doing things that we love and having a ball.

"Since this album, he's been writing a lot more, too. In the past four years, it's been slowing down. But now, all of a sudden, singing with two girls – and watching his wife sing – he really loved it. It was for us, but it was for him too. That's why it's important to me."

Yes, Marilyn says, Brian is definitely starting to come out of himself, at last – and their sojourn in Amsterdam, which began last Sunday and should continue for about six months, will help.

She's been given credit for holding him together, mentally, through the difficult post-*Pet Sounds* period.

"I don't know... I don't think so. If I did, I wasn't aware of it." But talking to her, a not-pretty-but-striking lady with a calm manner and an obvious sense of fun, it seems quite likely.

The obvious question; will Brian ever appear on stage with The Beach Boys again?

"I really hope he doesn't. The last time, it just tore him up for days – and now they really play louder than he's ever heard them. At the Festival Hall last weekend I had to put cotton in my ears. And if I have to do that, at a Beach Boys concert, then they're loud."

BRIAN'S ear trouble is, she says, permanent. The operation he had six years ago restored about 40 per cent of his hearing in the faulty ear, but in a way it's even worse than before because that 40 per cent comes through very tinny, with lots of static-like noise.

"It would have been better for him to stay where he could hardly hear anything with that ear. He can't be around loud sounds – he goes crazy on it. I imagine it must be horrible for him."

For that reason, Brian is unable to hear stereo properly – "By the time it gets round to that ear, the sound is confused." So he mixes everything down into mono, and that's where the engineers – like Desper – come in. They turn the mix into stereo, or (as in the case of "Surf's Up" and Spring's album) quadraphonic. But Brian can never hope to hear what they do.

It's about eight years since Marilyn, Diane, and their cousin appeared on The Beach Boys' "Be True To Your School", doing the cheerleader bit. Now, if you listen closely to some parts of the Spring album, you'll hear Brian contributing little harmonies and tenor lines. And so the circle is unbroken.

*RICHARD WILLIAMS*

Sisters Marilyn (left) and Diane Rovell of the pop duo Spring (aka American Spring) in LA, 1972

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: JANUARY 8, 1973

# HOLLAND

**In an old lightbulb factory near Amsterdam, The Beach Boys plot a promising new course.** ***BY SHARON O'CONNELL***

## Critics' Verdict

**"Fragmented, but impressive enough to win back a sizeable following and give the band a whole new credibility."**
NICK KENT, NME JANUARY 27, 1973

**"The overwhelming quality of *Holland* is consistency, firstly it sits right in with the sequence of Beach Boys music from '62 on; secondly the consistency of writing and performing is on a higher level."**
MELODY MAKER, JANUARY 27, 1973

"WE HAD FINISHED a very insignificant album, *Carl And The Passions "So Tough"*, and I looked at the material that was being prepared for the next album and I saw a desert." That was manager Jack Rieley's brutal summation of The Beach Boys' position in 1972, as related to Dutch broadcaster NPO four decades later. He was explaining his determination to shake things up for the band's next studio album and, although history has revealed Rieley to be a rather unreliable narrator, there's no denying his crucial role in steering the band back to something like popularity.

Rieley's decision to literally distance The Beach Boys from their candy-stripe Californian heartland was hardly random – they'd visited The Netherlands twice before, in late 1970 and early 1972. Their first trip was for a show in Amsterdam, which was nearly scuppered by a series of travel mishaps, but ended with the band facing an enthusiastic full house receptive to their new material, when they finally played at 5am. The second was for a Dutch TV special, when it became clear that the country's relaxed attitude and slower pace of life suited all involved. "It seemed to me essential to give them new influences, new sparks to refresh everything and open stuff up," Rieley told NPO. "So, I thought it would be great to go to The Netherlands. The guys like it; I love it. What more do we need?"

What The Beach Boys needed, in fact, was the full participation of their creative leading light. It was hoped that a different environment might shift the mindset of the extremely fragile and increasingly reclusive Brian Wilson. It took three failed attempts to get him on a plane, but in the summer of 1972 he joined the other Boys and a Cecil B DeMille-sized personal and professional support cast that was scattered within a 30-mile radius of central Amsterdam. Ahead of them travelled a state-of-the-art bespoke console, designed by chief engineer Steve Moffitt and built in LA to an impossibly tight deadline, then dismantled, air-freighted and reassembled, at eye-watering cost.

Recording began in June in rural Baambrugge, in a studio converted from an old light-bulb factory, and was by all accounts a relaxed and thoroughly enjoyable process. Speaking in 1983, Carl Wilson, who took the production tiller for *Holland*, said: "It was a very creative time for me. Brian had me working very hard, so he could have some time for himself. He really wasn't up to doing very much in terms of going to the studio every day, and I remember leaving the house early in the afternoon and coming home when the sun was coming up, in the summer, when the days were very long. It was a real good experience for me – a very spiritual time, also."

That mellow fruitfulness floods the album in the form of an over-easy, country-rock style with a West Coast flavour very much of its time, its constant an old upright piano that needed frequent retuning. The first three tracks have become nearly as emblematic of The Beach Boys as anything from their '60s heyday, despite the fact that only one of them, the satisfyingly seesawing "Sail On Sailor", was written by Brian Wilson (with Van Dyke Parks) and was sung by Blondie Chaplin. That was an old piece, dusted off and gussied up on the band's return to LA to satisfy Reprise, which initially rejected the album owing to its perceived lack of a potential single, and it replaced the Ricky Fataar/Chaplin

composition "We Got Love". The second is the Dennis Wilson-penned "Steamboat", a sweet, slightly whimsical track sung by Carl, becalmed by slide guitar and featuring the sounds of a bell and hissing steam valves. Lastly, "California Saga", a nostalgic, eco-mystical love letter to their home in three parts (written by Mike Love and Al Jardine, with contributions from American poet John Robinson Jeffers), the most familiar of which is feelgood second single "California".

"Leaving This Town" is also notable. Written and sung by Fataar and Chaplin, it's a dusty, regret-laden piano ballad cast along *Tapestry* and *Tumbleweed Connection* lines, but stretched out to almost six minutes via a synthesiser solo. "Funky Pretty" – originally titled "Spark In The Dark" – is the set closer and Brian Wilson's second co-writing credit, its gently hammering piano, trilling Hammond and beatific barbershop harmonies an updated echo of The Beach Boys' recent past, rather than an attempt to resuscitate it.

RECORDING WAS, BY ALL ACCOUNTS, A RELAXED AND ENJOYABLE AFFAIR

THE fact that Brian's input on *Holland* was slight served to highlight the frequently overshadowed talents of the other Beach Boys, but he made one typically eccentric contribution. Originally intended to be the centrepiece of a new Beach Boys record, the six tracks of "Mount Vernon And Fairway (A Fairy Tale)" were completed by Carl and Jack Rieley after Brian abandoned them, and included as a bonus EP with the album. Totalling just 12 minutes, they tell the Disney-ish story of a prince who finds a *"glowing magic transistor radio"*, which acts as both pied piper and friend. It's almost impossible not to read the set – named after the LA address of the Love family home – as a metaphor for a man who found sanctuary in music and was driven to follow his vision, but was isolated by his prodigious talent.

*Holland* was not the start of a new chapter for The Beach Boys, but a fresh, standalone page. "It was never intended as an escape," claimed Jack Rieley. "I never felt that they would go back to Los Angeles and keep following that same direction."

Still, together they'd pulled off quite a coup, despite the fact that the LP just squeaked into the US Top 40. It now seems odd that there was no plan as to how this soulful and laidback, country-rock sound might carry The Beach Boys forward at such an important point, especially when you consider their three follow-up records. The first was a hits-stacked live album that reached No 25 in the British charts. The others were compilations that sold in their millions. The Beach Boys were either reluctant to shake off their image as a jukebox act, or hadn't worked out how best to do it.

## Trackmarks HOLLAND

1. Sail On Sailor ★★★★
2. Steamboat ★★★★
3. California Saga: Big Sur ★★★
4. California Saga: The Beaks Of Eagles ★★★
5. California Saga: California ★★★
6. The Trader ★★★
7. Leaving This Town ★★★★
8. Only With You ★★
9. Funky Pretty ★★★★

**Label:** Brother/Reprise
**Produced:** The Beach Boys
**Recorded:** June 3 to October 9, 1972 at BBC 2 Studio, Baambrugge, Utrecht, Netherlands
**Personnel:** Carl Wilson (vocals, guitar, synthesiser), Brian Wilson (vocals, piano, synthesiser, drums), Dennis Wilson (vocals, piano), Blondie Chaplin (vocals, bass), Ricky Fataar (vocals, drums), Al Jardine (vocals, banjo, guitar), Mike Love (vocals)
**Additional musicians:** Tony Martin Jr (steel guitar), Daryl Dragon (Hammond organ), Charles Lloyd (flute), Bruce Johnston (vocals)
**Highest chart position:** UK 20, US 36

# "Maybe Phil Spector lives with Paul McCartney!"

In a secluded Bel-Air mansion, Brian Wilson plays eccentric host to ***RICHARD WILLIAMS***, while lying by the pool table and having his neck vibro-massaged. Then ***ROY CARR*** calls on Carl Wilson for the inside story on "Operation Holland". "Brian," says Carl, "was a little too sensitive..."

Genius in residence: Brian Wilson at his home in LA, 1973

## MELODY MAKER MARCH 10, 1973

LOS ANGELES

Wheeling down Beverly Glen Boulevard from Coldwater Canyon in a yellow Checker cab, the desirability of the residences increases almost every quarter-mile.

The stilt-houses jutting out of the Canyon's sides give way to expensive ranch-style bungalows and mock-Georgian mini-mansions, their hedges trimmed down to just 18 inches, so that passers-by can stare in envy at the Lincoln Continental, the Mercedes coupé, and the kids' twin Stingrays. Gardeners fuss over the flower beds, surrounded by lawns which look like they're trimmed by nail-clippers, daily.

Make a right turn at the bottom of Beverly Glen, onto Sunset Boulevard, past the baroque pink elegance of the Beverly Hills Hotel (where workmen are, at this moment, retouching the equatorial forest murals in miles and miles of corridor – by hand, with little brushes and pots of paint), and in a couple of minutes you enter Bel-Air.

"Well," says the cab driver in his sailor hat, "I've been working in LA for eight years, and I've been inside here maybe 20 times." Cab drivers, especially American, don't impress easily. Right now, this one is impressed.

Bel-Air is a residential estate, the quintessence of gracious living, Hollywood style. Whereas the board members of Beverly Drive are anxious to show you how far they've come, status-wise, the chairmen up in Bel-Air will go to considerable lengths to keep the peekers away.

Just inside the east gate of the estate, a clean white prowl car lurks behind some bushes. The foliage, a dazzling early-spring green, thickens along Bellagio Road until all that's visible of the houses is a nest of brick chimneys, or the glint from a leaded window.

Bellagio is the main artery of Bel-Air, running from east to west and numbering into the thousands. It's where Brian Wilson lives.

The tension started when I got to the gate, and looked beyond it to the low greenish house, built in the '30s for Tarzan's creator, Edgar Rice Burroughs. It was quiet – nothin' shakin' but the leaves on the trees, and the ligaments in my knees.

On the gatepost, a sign said that the house was protected by some patrol or other (I remembered the cabbie's instruction: "You better watch out, all them Bel-Air people got German Shepherds") and beside it was an intercom grille, with a buzzer-button and the legend: "STAND BACK! SPEAK NORMAL."

It seemed like a good motto for the occasion.

I pressed the buzzer, stood back and waited until Brian's wife, Marilyn, activated the electric gate opener. Actually, the gate turned out to be busted and open anyway.

The drive. The front door. Hello Marilyn. The dark hall. Hello dog. Hello second dog. The living room. Hello third dog. Hello cat. Hello Diane (Marilyn's sister). Hello...

Brian was lying on his front, almost under a big pool table. Diane bent over him, wielding a small electric massage appliance around the back of his neck and the tops of his shoulders. He was wearing an old red and white shirt outside tatty blue jeans, and battered brown indoor moccasins.

"Brian, this is Richard," said Marilyn.

"Uhh, hi," said Brian, trying to screw his head round and back to see me. He failed, because his long hair fell across his eyes, so he gave up and faced the carpet again.

"I'm sorry, but I woke up this morning, and I had this... uhh... headache. Can't get rid of it... real bad."

OK, I told myself. Perch on the pool table and talk with Marilyn. Stand back, speak normal.

I wanted to hear the new (*American*) *Spring* material Diane and Marilyn had just finished cutting, with Brian's help, in Iowa. Why Iowa? Seems they had a friend there, and the friend had a friend with a studio, and more friends who're musicians, and one thing led to another.

It was snowing in Iowa (it's in the seventies in LA) but Brian looked round again to say that it's the best studio he's ever used. They had a great time, using unknown musicians and working hard.

Marilyn got out the copy tape of the sessions, and played me four completed tracks over the new set of JBL studio monitor speakers suspended from each corner of the room.

First there was the one they hope will be the single, "Shyin' Away", written by David Sandler. David co-produced the first *Spring* album, and has worked on Beach Boys material. It's a great Top 40 song – the Rovell sisters retain the innocence they purveyed when they were The Honeys, back in the '60s, and Sandler's melody caters perfectly to their best qualities. I didn't think they wrote songs like that any more.

Then there's David's "Snowflakes", a pretty Christmas song with whispered vocals, and Brian's "Had To Phone Ya", which he wrote when Marilyn was in Europe and he was still in California. Lastly, there's a ballad by Dennis Wilson, one of the prettiest love songs he's written, beautifully sung by Diane.

They all sound like smashes to me, and Brian's production work – reminiscent in many places of his *Pet Sounds* touches, with perfectly placed oddities like a clarinet solo and a bassline provided by the bottom end of the piano keyboard – is tremendous. Marilyn explained that they were no longer with United Artists.

"Now how can they drop somebody after only one album? But I'm glad. I mean, they worked hard for us in Europe, but over here...!"

**WE TALKED ABOUT *SMILE*, THEN BRIAN HAMMERED OUT THE BEGINNING OF "HEROES AND VILLAINS"...**

COLUMBIA RECORDS ARE interested in them at the moment , and amazingly they're all like young kids on the brink of their first contract – excited, a bit breathless, wishin' and hopin' like mad. They really want Columbia to like their stuff.

"They were crazy about the first album," said Diane, still stroking Brian's neck with the vibro-massager. "But we're wondering whether they're going to like the new stuff... it's so different." Don't worry, girls, the only difference is that it's better.

Brian was still lying on the floor, groaning, and while we discussed Spring I was cajoled by a small beaglish dog called Banana into playing catch with a tennis ball.

It was fun for a while, but I couldn't help feeling that we were stalling. Time for a prod.

"Oh," I said, feigning nonchalance, "I'm really happy – I've just got hold of a copy of The Students' 'I'm So Young'."

That did the trick. Brian leapt to his feet, brushed the massager aside, forgot his headache and spoke.

"You did? Oh, that's fantastic. 'I'm So Young' by The Students... that record took me through senior year in high school. Oh, it's great."

This sudden burst of activity almost overbalanced me. Stand back, speak normal, stand back, speak normal, stand back... I only had time to nod in knowing assent before he spoke again.

"Listen here, I think I have that record somewhere... I'll go find it."

Finally, Brian reappeared. He hadn't found the record, and he started flipping through a pile of 45s lying on a chair, next to the upright piano.

Then he started putting them on the record player. First there was "Da Doo Ron Ron", which he played twice. Then "Fool For You" by the Impressions — "That's Curtis Mayfield," he said. "I know," I said. He sang and mimed along with the chorus.

He took out an album with "Phil Spector's Christmas Album" handwritten on the blank label, and played "Winter Wonderland", skipping the needle carelessly back to the beginning after the first few bars, over and

Diane Rovell (top) and Marilyn Wilson, May 1973

CBS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Brian Wilson on ARP and David Sandler on sax for the original *Spring* project, 1971

over again. He seemed to find it hard to drop it at the beginning of the track.

"Does Phil live near here?" I queried innocently.

"Oh... umm... I'm not sure. In Los Angeles... or does he live in New York? Maybe he lives with Paul McCartney!" He laughed mischievously, like a little boy. "Where does Paul McCartney live?"

"In London," I told him. I think he knew and it looked like I was getting a put on, so I asked him about this song called "This Could Be The Night" that he'd told me about before Spector had apparently recorded it with the Modern Folk Quartet around 1965, and Brian had heard it during the recording, but Phil never released it.

Brian rushed to the piano and demonstrated how it went. He remembered it very clearly, except for a couple of verses. He told me that he was trying to get the lyrics from Phil so that he could record it with Spring, but every time he called, Spector seemed strangely reluctant to part with them.

It's a great song, and Brian obviously got a buzz from singing it with differently harmonised basslines and new riffs, and it was fascinating to hear how, even though he was only mucking about, the harmonies and rhythms were pure Brian Wilson. No-one else could have been playing that piano.

He also sang The Platters' old "Twilight Time", then sprang up and led me through into a big room which used to be his home recording studio, where many of the finest Beach Boys cuts since 1966 were made. Now it has a bare wooden floor, a grand piano, a few chairs, and many pictures of Marilyn and the kids.

He took me through the room and up some stairs into a smaller chamber which used to be the studio's control room, pointing out where the monitor speakers had been. Newly laid bricks filled the hole which had been the window between booth and studio.

"Marilyn wanted some more room," he said. "She was tired of having musicians coming in and out of the house... but it was a great studio. We got a nice sound here."

He sat down at the piano. It was the very same instrument, Marilyn told me, that had been placed in a sandbox back in the days of *Smile*, when Brian had wanted to try and get a certain feeling into his music – the same kind of trip that he went through on the "Fire" section of "Elements", when he got the session musicians to dress up in firemen's uniforms.

DAVID SANDLER

Was there still, I asked him, any truth in the recurring rumour that the *Smile* tracks would be released one day? "No," he said emphatically. There just wasn't enough left to put together – only fragments like the snatch of "Surf's Up" around which they re-recorded the song last year. That, then, seems to be it, the final confirmation that the original *Smile*, with all its mythical reputation, will never be heard.

But we continued to talk about it for a while, and suddenly Brian hammered out the beginning of "Heroes And Villains". "*I've been in this town so long and back in the city I've been taken...*"

After one verse, he switched into an unfamiliar lyric and tune, and when it was over explained that this was the full original version as written by himself and Van Dyke Parks. Like several other songs – "Vegetables", for instance – they were hacked around and edited before being released on *Smiley Smile* and 45s. Had *Smile* come to fruition, we'd have heard them in all their glory.

LATER, when Diane told Marilyn what Brian had been singing she said: "No. Not *really*? He hasn't done that in years. That's fantastic!"

Back at the piano, Brian told me about this other song he was working on for *Spring*. He made me promise not to divulge its identity, but I can say it's in the "Cottonfields" mould – a Stephen Foster-type song, this time with an arrangement inspired by the Spencer Davis Group's "Gimme Some Loving".

"I gotta get David," he said. "David," he hollered up the stairs. The slight, pale figure of David Sandler appeared, and they sang it together, trying out harmonies and tags – and if it ever comes out, it'll be a classic record.

No wonder Brian didn't want the secret giving away, because anyone who had the formula could do it – and probably botch it up.

Before supper, Diane told Brian to show me round the house. He took me out as far as the gates of the pool, which were locked, and back onto the patio, where kids' toys cluttered the concrete.

He took me upstairs, where the guest rooms were piled with bric-a-brac, and the "master bedroom", where his own bed lurches drunkenly, one leg snapped off. One thing's for sure – the place looks lived-in and comfortable.

By this time, I'd given up standing back and speaking normal. Brian, too, had lost most of his jitteriness.

Next time, I thought, we'll get down to the interview. But meanwhile, it was nice to know that Brian Wilson isn't the madman that legend suggests.

He's just shy, and very nice.

***RICHARD WILLIAMS***

**NME** MARCH 10, 1973

THE MORNING after The Beach Boys hauled themselves back into Los Angeles after their self-imposed six months exile in Holland, Carl Wilson awoke in what he told was a "state of shock".

The delicate process of attempting to readjust his chromosomes to the paranoia of LA after what Wilson terms "the civilised tranquillity" of the Netherlands was just too acute for his nervous system to assimilate in one day.

High above garish Sunset Strip – 11 floors to be precise – but not high enough to eradicate the incessant noise of the nose-to-trail traffic – Wilson details some of the traumatic circumstances that led up to the mammoth Beach Boys airlift last June...

A meticulously planned exodus which, at a cost in excess of half a million dollars, was to take The Beach Boys lock, stock and 16-track recording studio out of the Hollywood Hills and set them down amid the picturesque windmills and canals of Baambrugge, just a 20-minute fast limo ride from the centre of Amsterdam.

Such an ambitious operation, it should straight away be pointed out, wasn't the result of a mere flight of fancy. It was born out of the eroding effect that living in LA was having upon The Beach Boys' creative resources – with the end product, namely the *Holland* album, more than justifying the means.

Together with their '70s masterwork *Surf's Up*, *Holland* represents the renaissance of a band – now in its 11th year – which, at its previous creative peak ('66/'68), was neglected in its mother country or dismissed by ill-informed trendsetters as little more than America's definitive Golden Oldie party band.

"Things had reached a point where we just had to move out of LA and find a fresh environment," Carl Wilson explains.

"We all feel that it's getting to be very

unnatural in this town, with just about everything changing too fast for comfort. You've seen it yourself... a lot of people are freaking out."

A statement of fact underlined that particular week by a spate of senseless thrill-slayings, a minor earth tremor and the thickening of the yellow smog cloud that invariably blots out the sun and threatens one day to completely asphyxiate the city.

Looking out across the impressive view from his balcony, Wilson continues. "People are a part of nature and, when their environment suddenly becomes unnatural, something drastic is bound to happen.

"Smog," he utters the most obscene of Californian four-letter words, "like the kind you get in LA, is nerve gas. And as such, it has a most alarming effect upon people.

"They get edgy, nervous and sometimes very violent... you can feel the tension. You can't blame anyone for wanting to escape."

Though they weren't aware of it at the time, the first hint of The Beach Boys' malfunctioning came with the release last year of *Carl & The Passions – So Tough!*.

It's an album which, as an entity, Carl doesn't particularly care for. "I can enjoy listening to the songs separately," he offers as that collection's only redeeming quality.

DEVISED by The Beach Boys themselves, execution of "Operation Holland" was put in the hands of Hollywood PR-man Bill de Simone.

Having to contend with Holland's acute housing shortage, de Simone's first and perhaps most arduous assignment was to secure suitable accommodation for: Brian Wilson, his wife, two children, sister-in-law and housekeeper; Dennis Wilson, his wife and child; Carl Wilson, wife, two children, mother, brother-in-law, housekeeper and two dogs; Mike Love, a wife, two children and a maid; Al Jardine with the same contingent as Love; Ricky Fataar, wife plus in-laws; and Blondie Chaplin with a female companion.

De Simone also had to find shelter for chief engineer Steve Moffitt with secretary and son; additional engineers Gordon Rudd (plus wife), Jon Parker (plus lady) and Thom Gellert (plus admirers); Russ Mackie (the band's travelling attaché); Jack Rieley (Brother Records mainman) with his secretary Carole Hayes (plus Mr Hayes) and Ricky's dog.

By way of an encore, de Simone also commandeered 14 automobiles along with stereo sets and pianos for each household.

As it turned out, Dutch recording facilities weren't conducive to Beach Boys requirements either, nor was sufficient studio time available.

So it was agreed that a sophisticated studio would be designed from scratch and constructed in California, then broken down and airlifted to Holland and reassembled in a converted farm building.

And all this to be completed in 90 days.

This unenviable task befell Steve Moffit who, assisted by physics whiz-kid Gordon Rudd, started work on a 24-hour shift basis. With a 30-input console with 20-channel monitor system, 30-quad pans, 30-stereo pans plus a 1,000-hole patch bay, there was no slacking.

**"WHEN BRIAN FEELS LIKE WORKING, HE'S FEROCIOUS... IT'S A JOY TO WATCH"**
CARL WILSON

There are four daily flights out of LA to Amsterdam, and for nearly five weeks the components for this custom-built studio occupied each and every outward-bound flight, while additional electronics came from London. Crates alone totalled 5,000 dollars for the 7,300 pounds of technological deadweight.

Even The Beach Boys can't estimate the overall cost of the operation, but chances are the sales alone from *Holland* won't recoup the outlay.

"*There's a fog upon LA*," George Harrison once sang, but when Carl Wilson, Russ Mackie and I drove to the top of the immortalised Blue Jay Way, it was one of those precious clear days when you imagine you can almost see forever.

As we gaze at the city sprawled some hundreds of feet below us, I ask Carl Wilson if *Holland* could have materialised so effectively "down there".

"It probably wouldn't have had the same direction," he replies, "and therefore could have easily turned out like *So Tough*, which I consider to be a very strange album.

"Music comes out anywhere, but the environment will definitely have a different effect on your moods, and there's a definite mood to be found in *Holland*.

"After a couple of false starts, even Brian was persuaded to move both his house and his family. In fact, just recently Brian was talking about going back."

Various aspects of the *Holland* album come up for discussion as Carl turns his attention from the scenic view. "We've always been extremely meticulous when recording, but on all the *Holland* sessions things came together very easily and also very naturally. This album has a much better blending than ever before, with both Blondie and Ricky now an intricate part of The Beach Boys as a unit.

"Fundamentally, we did the basic tracks and then maybe added an extra vocal bit of effect on top, but nothing more adventurous than that.

"Of all the cuts, 'Only With You' was the easiest to compete. We did the entire song in approximately two hours."

Referring to what The Beach Boys affectionately call "Brian Wilson's gift" – the "Mount Vernon And Fairway" bonus 7-inch mini-album presented with *Holland* – younger brother Carl declares: "That was a lotta fun to do, and something completely different than anything we've ever done before."

In fact, after periods of spasmodic activity, Brian Wilson is gradually emerging from his life as a recluse, and managing to contend better with the unfortunate "20th Century Genius" tag that got hung around his neck.

"Reality is reality," says Carl Wilson, "and it sometimes frightens people. And because Brian was a little too sensitive, he wasn't prepared to cope with so..." He stops mid-sentence, leaving you to draw your own conclusion.

"When Brian feels like working, he's ferocious... It's a joy to watch. He's got some great music people haven't heard yet, but give him time."

Of the legend that The Beach Boys are musical perfectionists, Wilson has this to say: "Look, everyone that goes into a recording studio wants their music to sound as perfect as they can get it. However, if we have two takes of one song and we have to choose between the one that's technically accurate and the one with the best feel, it would undoubtedly be the one with the best feel.

"At a session, we always let nature take its course, and as far as this band is concerned, it seems to be the right approach. The great thing about this band is that we really do enjoy playing, touring and recording together."

Wilson puts The Beach Boys 1973 in their correct perspective when he concludes. "Today, people are getting into the sounds coming out of the speakers and not getting hung up on our striped shirts." ***ROY CARR***

Dennis Wilson in Amsterdam, 1971

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

RELEASED: JULY 5, 1976

# 15 BIG ONES

**"Brian", apparently, "is back!" And favouring an album of cover versions. What could possibly go wrong?**

BY ANDREW MUELLER

## Critics' Verdict

"The album that was supposed to re-establish The Beach Boys as a studio force, and more importantly Brian Wilson as any kind of force at all, only leaves everyone concerned at square one."

MAX BELL, NME, JULY 3, 1976

"After a decade and a half of serious and immeasurably enjoyable progression, the band are putatively looking back to their earliest days in an attempt to rekindle the flame of youth, which is odd, as they've always had a touch of Peter Pan to them."

GEOFF BROWN, MELODY MAKER, JULY 10, 1976

NOT, AS THE title might have unhelpfully suggested, a Beach Boys best-of. Nor, as expectations might have tantalisingly promised, of The Beach Boys' best, *15 Big Ones* was supposed to be the album on which The Beach Boys got their act properly back together. It was going to be the one on which they welcomed Brian Wilson in from the fretful reclusion in which he had been cloistered while his group had toured – immensely successfully – without him, filling stadiums with their girls-and-cars-and-surfboards hits, essentially cashing in as their own tribute act.

This had opened the first significant gap in The Beach Boys' discography – after making at least one album a year since *Surfin' Safari* in 1962, they had gone three years without releasing any new material. But Brian Wilson, it was said, was getting better, writing again with the encouragement of a new psychiatrist, Dr Eugene Landy. For the first time since *Pet Sounds* a decade earlier, Brian Wilson would produce a Beach Boys album. "Brian", declared the pre-release advertising, "is back."

And for the first two and a half minutes of the album's running time, it sounds – audaciously, hilariously – encouragingly like it. The gleeful swipe at Chuck Berry's "Rock And Roll Music", which fanfares proceedings, so exactly resembles The Beach Boys doing Chuck Berry's "Rock And Roll Music" that it is (still) difficult not to laugh at the sheer joyous effrontery of it. If the rest of *15 Big Ones* had sworn by this same creed – of goofy, naive but absolutely virtuoso knockabout – it might have been a slight masterpiece (Brian Wilson, indeed, at one point favoured an album of cover versions). Unfortunately and regrettably, if perhaps understandably, there was a general reluctance to submit completely to the will of the returned prodigal. Both Dennis and Carl Wilson later expressed frustration with the record, suggesting that the cover versions (eight of the 15 tracks) were supposed to have been warm-up exercises to help their older brother get his swing back. The sessions which produced *15 Big Ones* were difficult, gusting, rancorous; the chafing is all but audible.

Parts of *15 Big Ones* are just about as bad as The Beach Boys ever got – specifically, the parts which constitute the epic sag in roughly the middle of the album, three consecutive songs ("Talk To Me", "That Same Song", "TM Song") which barely occupy six minutes between them, but during which it feels possible to grow a beard. "Talk To Me", written by Joe Seneca and originally a hit for Little Willie John, sounds like The Beach Boys are learning it as they play it, before it is inexplicably interrupted by a burst of Freddy Cannon's "Tallahassee Lassie". "That Same Song" is an unwelcome reminder of the ease with which Brian Wilson's occasional inclination towards whimsy, if not reined in, could subside into outright tweeness. "TM Song", a 90-second ode to the delights of Transcendental Meditation, is about 88 seconds too long. It sounds, musically and lyrically, like the theme tune to some mercifully unmade *Sesame Street* exclusively for the children of hippies ("*Transcendental Meditation should be part of your time/It's simple, it's easy, as making this rhyme*"; and better than sitting around doing nothing, one supposes).

Elsewhere, however , *15 Big Ones*, while never likely to supersede *Pet Sounds* in any listener's affections, provides ample reasons to be grateful for Brian Wilson's return to work. "It's OK", with saxophones credited to Roy Wood and Wizzard, and "Had To Phone Ya", are both

faithful but fresh iterations of The Beach Boys' familiar template, of ecstatic harmonies giving soaring voice to an emotional palette still (probably unhealthily for them, certainly happily for the listener) marooned in adolescence. It says much about this state of somewhat arrested development that Al Jardine's bright, upful "Susie Cincinnati" fits in nicely, despite having first appeared as a B-side on "Add Some Music To Your Day" six years earlier, as does a version of The Six Teens' mid-'50s doo-wop hit "A Casual Look", originally recorded by a group whose members were insufficiently old to vote.

The other noteworthy original on *15 Big Ones* is "Everyone's In Love With You", Michael Love's syrupy mash note to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the enterprising Indian guru then amassing an enormous fortune flogging Eastern mysticism to wealthy Westerners, using credulous musicians as his agents. It's a basically daft song, the more so in hindsight, but nevertheless pretty, decorated with a fluttering solo by jazz flautist Charles Lloyd.

PARTS OF *15 BIG ONES* ARE JUST ABOUT AS BAD AS THE BEACH BOYS EVER GOT

FOR all of the subsequent harrumphing by sections of the Wilson camp about the preponderance of cover versions, most of the highlights of *15 Big Ones* are provided by The Beach Boys incorporating the work of others into their canon as only they can. "Palisades Park", also originally a hit for Freddy Cannon, is the rawest, most raucous – and, not coincidentally, probably the best – track on the album, as close as The Beach Boys were ever likely to get to sounding like a garage band. It was written by Chuck Barris, best known as creator and host of *The Gong Show*, but also (at least by his own subsequent and nigh universally disbelieved and disputed account) a hitman for the CIA (the Ramones would later have a whack at the same song, on 1989's *Brain Drain*).

The version of "Blueberry Hill" is a masterclass in managing expectations. The listener, braced for an instant unleashing of trademark stacked harmonies, initially hears little more than Michael Love's voice and the upright bass of Jim Hughart, who at the time was also helping to create Tom Waits' signature noir sound. When the track eventually, inevitably, goes full Beach Boys, it reminds what an unusual – and adaptable – sound the group make.

The best of *15 Big Ones* is saved for last. The Wilson Brothers – specifically Brian and Carl – tap in for The Righteous Brothers on the Spector/Goffin/King weeper "Just Once In My Life". Both sing the absolute ragged heck out of it, Brian especially, with voices that genuinely sound hoarse with yelling at each other. Behind them, The Beach Boys are a sumptuous counterpoint to the desperate truth recognised by the lyric: "*That old pot of gold ain't so easy to find.*"

## Trackmarks 15 BIG ONES

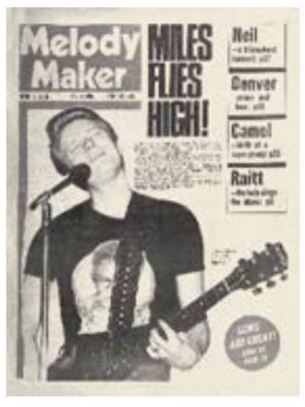
1. Rock And Roll Music ★★★★
2. It's OK ★★★
3. Had To Phone Ya ★★★
4. Chapel Of Love ★★★
5. Everyone's In Love With You ★★★
6. Talk To Me ★★
7. That Same Song ★★
8. TM Song ★
9. Palisades Park ★★★★
10. Susie Cincinnati ★★★
11. A Casual Look ★★★
12. Blueberry Hill ★★★★
13. Back Home ★★★
14. In The Still Of The Night ★★★
15. Just Once In My Life ★★★★

**Label:** Brother/Reprise
**Producer:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** September 1975; January 30 to May 15, 1976 at Brother Studios, Santa Monica
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (vocals, piano, guitar, bass, harmonica), Al Jardine (guitar, vocals), Mike Love (vocals), Carl Wilson (vocals, guitar, bass, synth), Dennis Wilson (drums, vocals)
**Additional musicians include:** Charles Lloyd (flute), James Hughart (dbl bass), Ricky Fataar (percussion), Bruce Johnston (piano, vocals)
**Highest chart position:** UK 31, US 8

# "We're in the shit!"

**Brian is back, trumpets an upbeat Dennis Wilson, as CHRIS CHARLESWORTH meets up with him in New York. One year later, however, the state of The Beach Boys and their leader distresses MAX BELL. "Brian went through hell," admits Carl, extolling the virtues of Dr Eugene Landy. "He won't ever need the uppers and the downers again." A brief audience with the man himself, however, suggests otherwise...**

**MELODY MAKER** APRIL 3, 1976




A NEW studio album is in the works, Brian Wilson is back in business and The Beach Boys are planning to visit England in late summer.

These were the main points to come out of a chat with Dennis Wilson, who passed through New York last week to spread the word that The Beach Boys are no longer going to rely on their golden oldies to maintain their current status as a major concert attraction in the US.

Over the past three years, the group has found a change of fortune here. While they were considered unfashionable at the turn of the decade and early '70s, The Beach Boys have made a comeback of great proportions, helped not a little by Capitol, their old record company, releasing a couple of double albums comprising numerous Beach Boys hits during the summers of 1974 and 1975.

Two other factors have helped them re-attain their status as a major touring band. After years of management problems, they were taken over two years ago by James William Guercio, the rock mogul who owns Caribou Studios in Colorado, manages Chicago and had a lifelong desire to join The Beach Boys. He played bass with the group for a while and handled their affairs with superb strategy.

Also The Beach Boys were suddenly befriended by a whole host of other, more successful groups, whose Good Samaritan attitude hoisted them back on the concert trail.

They toured with Chicago in a double bill last year, were invited by Elton John to play at Wembley in London, and found themselves playing massive arenas with such top drawers as Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young.

And while all this was going on, they had no current record to plug, only the classics of the '60s and a few songs from *Holland*, their last album for Warner Brothers.

But: "We're doing a new studio album which we hope will be out in June," said Dennis. "We've been working on and off on the album for about nine months, and the personnel includes the original Beach Boys, including Brian. He has already recorded six cuts with us and the way it looks is that most of the album will be Brian, although there's one song of my own that may get on.

"Actually, we've put together something like 40-odd tracks over the past few years but never released them. I guess you could call the songs rather like choral religious music that moves into rock'n'roll later.

"What we want is an album where every track is great, no low spots, a total concept that we can be proud of."

It must be hard shaking off the oldies image and getting down to new material, especially as the old material was finding a new life with new fans?

"On the new tour that's coming up we will be doing the new stuff as well as some old material," said Dennis. "There will always be people wanting to hear the older tunes. I don't get bored with them... they're fun.

"I have to say, though, that I get tired of playing some of the old tunes, but many of them are timeless to me. As a musician you can let go with them instead of making them sound contrived. You can play them in a new way each time and bring in little variations."

Nevertheless, it's the old tunes that have brought about The Beach Boys Renaissance. "There was a time, long ago, when The Beach Boys were a very big touring group. Then, after a while, there was a time when it was uncool to be into the Beach Boys. Somehow The Beach Boys didn't fit at one period, but now... well, I guess we're just fitting again. It's not uncool to like The Beach Boys any more. Personally I've always liked them," he says, laughing.

"But that is a fact," continues Wilson, serious again. "The group really wasn't hot at one time, and the record sales weren't hot, but we got back on to the concert trail and changed things around. It was hard work, but worth the effort because we're very respected now."

Wilson argues that the increased touring activity was primarily responsible for the enormous sales of *Endless Summer* and *Spirit Of America*, rather than the other way round. "There were problems with Warner Brothers but we couldn't help that," said Wilson. "We were drawing 100,000 people to concerts yet they couldn't move our more recent albums at all.

"I'm sure a lot of people had never heard the group until those records came out. I see 14-year-olds at the shows who were not even born when we started."

And Jim Guercio's influence? "Well, I think we were already coming back as a concert band when he joined us, but we have a great respect for him and we also like Chicago's music.

"I think that now The Beach Boys represent the truth in the creative sense instead of the pop sense. There's no hustle to get the three or four albums out in a year, just a desire to create something meaningful... and that's why there's been this delay in putting out a new album."

Having consolidated their position again, Wilson says the group intend to relax live appearances in favour of the studio in future. "It may sound funny, but I want to concentrate the next 10 years on making albums. As a Beach Boy I want to stay with them and stand behind Brian, being a tool for his disposal for the rest of my life, no matter whether it's music or mowing his lawn for him.

"He is a master, musically. I am dumb-founded at him. I am in awe of him. I've grown up with him and watched him go through changes, and he is the most vulnerable human being I know. The depth of that guy... I mean... he changed the world with his influence. When you sing on something like 'In My Room' and then sit back and listen to what he's done, not just with my part, but with the song... then you realise. I'm devoting my life to Brian on a musical level, and the rest of the group all feel the same way. When Brian plays something for us, we just gape. It gets very emotional."

**"IT'S NOT UNCOOL TO LIKE THE BEACH BOYS ANY MORE. PERSONALLY, I'VE ALWAYS LIKED THEM!"**
DENNIS WILSON

Last year, The Beach Boys opened their own studio in Los Angeles, a studio that Dennis describes as the best in the world. It is available to others for hire, but so far its only incumbents have been the group themselves, clustered around Brian Wilson, shaking down harmonies that he's written. "Brian is like a little kid in the studio, like a kid who's just discovered sex for the first time. He rushes around playing this

Channel surfing: the band during filming of *The Beach Boys: It's OK* TV special, 1976

and that, and telling us to play this and that. The enthusiasm he still has is infectious, really."

***CHRIS CHARLESWORTH***

**NME** AUGUST 6, 1977

CONSIDERING that in some way or other he is just about to have his dirty washing dragged across the front pages of the daily press, Carl Wilson, primary spokesman for The Beach Boys, seems remarkably chirpy.

You know the picture already. The Beach Boys schedule for a ball-busting out-of-doors festive jamboree and then blow it all out at the drop of a surfboard.

Almost immediately the Fleet Street truffle hounds and the music press, who are used to such disappointments, wade in with the "Beach Boys Snub Fans" shock probe.

Apparently the ageing old ravers can find time to play their greatest hits routine for the conglomeration of CBS International Corps but can't make with the music for the people who pay the wages; that's you.

Mailbags groan with the collected angst of aggrieved punters who don't take kindly to the thought of Southern California's finest swanning for the man behind the luxurious closed doors of Grosvenor House instead of making with the harmonies on the boards at Wembley or wherever.

Prior to the cancellation ticket sales had been spasmodic. Good for Wembley (30,000 sold) but less impressive elsewhere. A figure of £4,000 in sales was quoted for the Cardiff venue. Whether this is accurate or not it seems certain that tickets out of London would not have been sold out.

When you consider that the last time the band played here the bill included the Eagles, Joe Walsh and Elton John and gave only one show (at Wembley), the enormity of the project becomes apparent. For Chrissakes... what self-respecting band wants to play a convention (sic) in any case?

The polite rattle of elegant wine glasses and the sensuous tinkling of customised twin sets is no substitute for 70,000 screaming fans waiting on their summer treat. The vibrations are distinctly bad.

So how come Carl's so bright and breezy? Well, for a start, he's talking to me, fending off the... uh... heavier questions with contrite sincerity.

Up since 7 o'clock, the youngest Wilson is tickled pink by the general wondrousness of

NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGE

the effort made to ensure the tour at least looked convincing. He sups a glass of champagne and puffs on a Kool. I position myself respectfully on the receiving end of a force nine gale blowing through the open window and survey the bare necessities of the 'hotel suite'; the customary star-is-amongst-us aura is missing save for a huge basket of assorted soft fruits (a Fortnums special no doubt), lying in state on the chic glass-top table and Carl's large presence, reclined on a nifty leatherette settee.

"Oooww... wow... ooch. Excuse me. My back... aww fuck... I'm movin' house ya see and I lifted a few heavy boxes... oooh... I'll be all right."

A GENTLEMAN from Rogers & Cowan (Beverly Hills and London), who is escorting me through the introductory rap, leaves to liaise with some radio sorts. Look, Carl, about these concerts...

"Sure, sure, we all feel really funky about that. But there wasn't enough time. So many folks worked real hard to make it work, but it was obvious from early July that we couldn't make tracks.

"Blame me," he adds magnanimously, "go ahead – it was all my fault. The other guys were hither and yon and I took the corporate decision. Gosh, though, I feel bad about that, the promoters workin' so hard and all."

There are those among us who felt that the decision to scrap was indeed inevitable, if not for the official party line reasons that all journalists will undoubtedly be given.

I get the impression that Carl, good-natured as he is, is speaking from a carefully vetted speech. When I read that he had almost broken down in tears at the decision I wasn't impressed. Carl insists that his emotional response was genuine.

A dreary numbness comes over me. The bill, Carl. Look at it. Ricci Martin? Gallagher & Lyle? Even the Feelgoods and Dave Edmunds, stalwarts of the old school etc, etc, are hardly festival fodder.

Add to that the fact that no other band in the world, not even Led Zeppelin, the Stones or The Beatles reunion, could be sure of selling out that number of outdoor gigs one after the other, it just wasn't viable.

"I know what you're saying, man, but I was pleased about the bill. The Feelgoods are wunnerful, I saw them at the CBS Convention last year in LA, but I guess they haven't exactly got on the stick have they?" (Roughly translated as: the Feelgoods are not massively popular stadia fillers).

Ricci Martin, Dean Martin's offspring, is a special case. Though a turkey of the first order, Carl has produced his own solo album. The fact that he doesn't mean a used match over here escapes Carl's notice. However, he is able to put my mind at rest over the cancellation by changing direction. Just between you and me: "Lemme put it another way. It got so weird, everything was so fucking weird that it weirded out." He chuckles triumphantly at this inescapable piece of logic. The music news grapevine also threw up the fact that The Beach Boys are ill-prepared for any under-the-spotlight publicity at present.

Mike Love has only recently returned from a six months sojourn with the Maharishi and none of 'em have rehearsed since January. Carl has been taking care of business on the West Coast while Brian and Dennis sunned it in Hawaii.

The man slips down a quick mugful of bubbly and continues:

"This has cost us $200,000, y'know, but it still isn't fair to do a late tour. We were committed to the convention last March 2 when we signed with Caribou, so that's that. We're in the shit, whatever way I phrase it."

The move to James William Guercio's Caribou company came as no surprise to anyone who has noted the abysmal sales figures for *15 Big Ones* and *The Beach Boys Love You*.

Despite Brian's supposed fitness, Warners and the Sons Of Surf have not exactly struck it off. Add this to the fact that Guercio was, until recently, their bass player and matters fall into place. Except that James (*Electra Glide In Blue*) Guercio has been offed by the Boys. Strange, Carl? "Firstly, CBS are probably the best record company in the world. We can handle the conflict of interests with Guercio. We sacked him twice actually, but The Beach Boys corporate counsel has agreed that there'll be no business hassle. Unless it's a special case... Oh, excuse me. Heh, heh."

Carl juggles with the phone and spills an ash-tray simultaneously.

It transpires that they have one more record for Warners to complete, going under the ironic title of *Adult Child*. As their Caribou debut is scheduled for autumn release, the winter market will be saturated with Beach Boys product.

The legal issues are worrying Carl mightily. He refers me to their lawyer, Mike Lama. But will *Adult Child* be a contract pay-off?

"Naah, Brian's writing great songs, more grandiose than *Love You*, with more players."

Anything in the can, though?

"I can't say. The legal shit is just hitting the fan." Which means that some of it might fly back.

Amid the spaghetti imbroglio surrounding The Beach Boys' current affairs, the commercial failure at Warners looms large. The blame, however much you dig the group, can be laid in both camps. The rather cavalier handling of the recent debacle is all part of the Brothers' inability at the moment to get their act together.

*15 Big Ones* was originally to be a double album, one disc of oldies and one of originals. Despite the constant protestations that Brian is fighting fit, that really isn't the truth. It was Brian who presented the band with a finished single album as a fait accompli and no-one can kid themselves that the renaissance of the Hawthorne High boy wonder turned studio genius has been without its pitfalls.

Carl Wilson openly criticises the Warners albums and recounts a tale of a meeting between the band and Warners top dog Mo Ostin early last year.

"The chemistry has always been wrong. Mo's employees have said we're his folly and I guess he has earned the right to do what he wants. He came up to us once and asked us if there was anything we wanted and Dennis said, 'Yeah, just get us off the label.'"

Unlike EMI in the UK, who certainly know how to sell Beach Boys records, and keep on repacking ad infinitum, Warners have not attempted to milk the greatest hits dry. On the other hand the group have ridden their live successes by compromising their potential and giving the fans exactly what they want.

Carl is unrepentant on his own creative lull, although when you consider a track record that included "Feel Flows", "The Trader", "Long Promised Road" and a major part in the production of *Surf's Up* itself, he has been plain plumb lazy. The constant deference to Brian hasn't resulted in a comparable raising of standards.

"Well, we aim to please. Like I opened the mail one day and there's a platinum record for *20 Golden Greats* and *Endless Summer* has sold three million-plus. I guess we strike a happy medium."

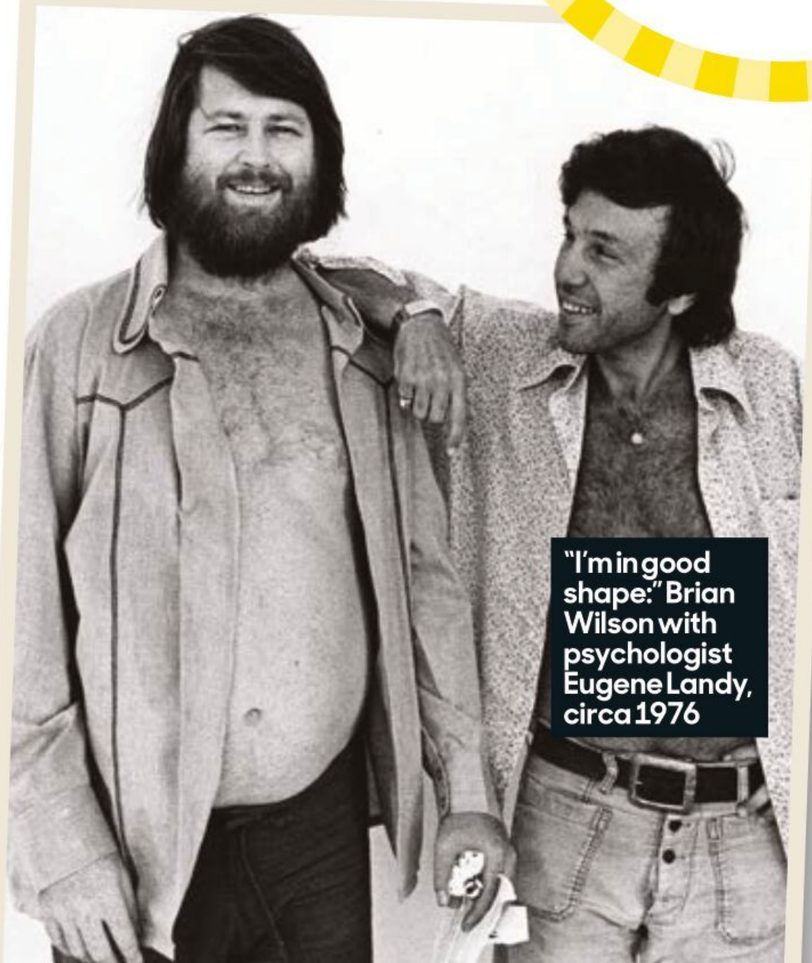
**"BRIAN WENT THROUGH HELL TO GET BACK AGAIN. HE JUST FUCKED UP COMPLETELY WITH DRUGS"**
CARL WILSON

The back catalogue now belongs to The Beach Boys, but EMI, who were supposed to destroy their stock of *Surf's Up* and *Sunflower*, never did so and plan to re-release both albums, a move guaranteed to distract the public gaze even further from contemporary offerings.

The heavily publicised deal between Terry Melcher and Brian which was due to result in 26 sides only resulted in two, a single. At that time Bruce Johnston had said that if Equinox didn't produce six hits that year he'd doggawn sell his record company. Did he hell.

Other possibly creative outlets for The Beach Boys that never materialised include the squashing of the second *American Spring* album on Columbia (Brian and Marilyn bought out UA's share in the debut).

Even though The Beach Boys live still do give



"I'm in good shape:" Brian Wilson with psychologist Eugene Landy, circa 1976

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGE

Brian Wilson rehearsing for The Beach Boys' CBS Convention show in London on July 30, 1977

most other bands in the universe a run for their money, the artistic impasse has reached an all-time low. Past glory is what keeps the show feasible, but that apart, they seem like old men playing a young man's game.

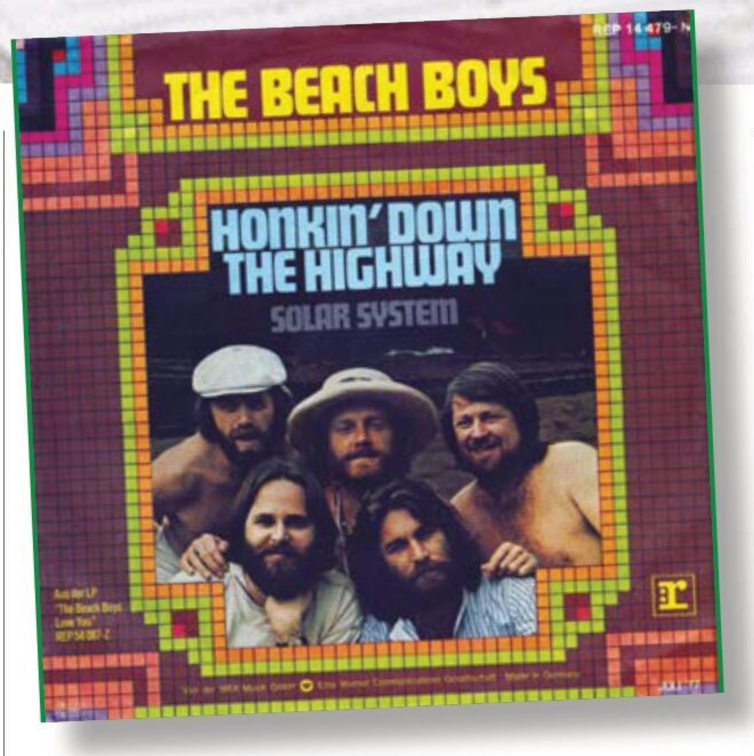
THERE is something very tragic in the reiteration that Brian is well again and everything is cool. Carl's line on his big brother is predictable, touching maybe and yet only adding fuel to the optimists who persist in believing things can be like they were.

While Carl cruises, Brian fights to regain his old touch. Listening to that is painful, seeing the man even more so.

Carl tows the democratic statement in front of me again: "Brian went through hell to get back again. He just fucked up completely with drugs. Not whoopee time, but to get back to shape. Eugene Landy (the Dr Feelbad of the classic *Rolling Stone* article) is a great clinical psychologist. He got a little wild with Brian at times, but he won't ever need the uppers and the downers again."

Whether Brian is mentally fit is another matter. Chain-smoking lost him his voice on *15 Big Ones* (what Carl calls "Brian's scratchy voice"). He now looks slimmer and healthier than since the mid-'60s, but still requires a constant companion and bodyguard to keep off the pressures of the rock'n'roll circus.

As Audree Wilson, mother of the brothers, walks in, I figure that Carl and I are through. I ask Phil Symes, press aide, if I can talk to Brian. It's all right. Upstairs Brian and his constant companion Steve Love are rooming in what is obviously the hotel's demon plush suite. Love looks at me hard before I go in, Brian




immediately scurries off to his bedroom. The amount of mutual composure means that the atmosphere is strained. Brian looks with genuine trepidation at my cassette recorder and makes a supreme effort to sit beside me, straining with his left ear. It's the only time I've ever felt like a vulture. To be honest, five minutes is all I can stand.

For the first time in three years of interviewing I felt like an intruder on something private and sad. Brian may have come through hell, but he didn't seem to me to be out of it, either.

A huge, towering man, Brian oozes tension and paranoia. Put some of it down to tortured artistic genius if you like, I've never been overawed by anyone like that before, but all normal human spirit appears to have drained out of him like a tide that can't be turned back.

Brian Wilson needs no vindication from me, he's proved anything there is to be proved and more. If The Beach Boys called it a day, no-one could complain. No-one could feel cheated, because Brian Wilson has given 15 years to some of the finest music imaginable and in the process he's lost his health, sanity and that grip on reality which most of us never think about.

He answers my questions simply, in a remote control monotone. No flicker of emotion. Jesus, I even think he's scared of me when it's the other way round. He talks about his health and his career in exactly the same way that Carl speaks of him, except that the hollow shell tells a greater truth.

"I'm fine, fine... in good shape. The Caribou album is nice, it's a natural album, a good progression from *The Beach Boys Love You*.

"Yes, I'm happy with the last two records. This one reflects where we are. The new record is unique in that we don't use Fender bass any more, all the bass is played by a Moog synthesiser. I'm very satisfied with it."

Earlier I'd asked Carl if the "Fire" tapes (the original *Smile* album) were ever materialising. He assured me that one day they would do. "They are literally hot, they'll blow people's heads off."

I ask Brian the same question. A twitch of panic crosses his face. Every answer requires enormous self-control. The emphasis is frightening. "No... no... we never have any plans for that. I don't see that ever coming out."

Last year, Dennis Wilson was interviewed by *Crawdaddy* and had this to say for the brother they love so much: "Brian Wilson is The Beach Boys. He is the band. We're his messengers, is all of it. He's everything."

But Brian is not a god. He is, after all, a very brave and brilliant man who got broken once too often. I'd love to think there were more *Pet Sounds* bursting forth. There won't be. The water lock is screwed tight. When is the pretending going to stop?

***MAX BELL***

LESTER COHEN/WIREIMAGE

RELEASED: APRIL 11, 1977

# LOVE YOU

**Ding Dang! Emphatically back this time, Brian contemplates love, the stars and Johnny Carson. Oddness ensues.**

BY LUKE TORN

## Critics' Verdict

"Wilson has proven himself capable of ruling the roost with this record... a more democratic state of affairs may return so that brothers Dennis and Carl can at least contribute actively."

NICK KENT, NME, MARCH 9, 1977

"This album can appear insubstantial on early acquaintance, but further attention yields many riches."

MELODY MAKER, MARCH 19, 1977

THE BEACH BOYS' 21st studio album, destined to be their final full-length with Brian Wilson fully at the helm, plays like an elaborate riddle. It's a passionate, highly-anticipated-at-the-time comeback, yet an artistic last gasp. It flaunts an embarrassment of riches yet, some would say, offers up some of the most embarrassing pop songs ever conceived. For a band notorious for studio polish and perfection, it's gruff and ragged, as if the demo versions became the final product. Somehow, it's both highly sophisticated and supremely childlike. Love it or hate it, Beach Boys' *Love You* is a seething house of polemics.

Following *15 Big Ones*, *Love You* was to be the crucial second wave within a new Wilson trilogy (the third chapter, *Adult/Child*, remains unreleased), recorded during his first escapade with Eugene Landy, and it remains a difficult proposition for many. For those willing to suspend expectations and just let the record's absurdity and open-hearted wonder seep in, though, it's unforgettable; songs that sound silly at first manage to resonate with a vengeance later.

"This is my favourite album we ever did," Wilson later proclaimed, rather piquantly. "Everything's going on in there."

Of course, the larger picture is that Brian Wilson was damaged goods in the late '70s, a troubled soul trying – or, perhaps more truthfully, being forced – to rise to the occasion. In context, his compositions — simple expressions of love, joy, and escapism—take on a personal glow, tortured autobiography turned (ostensibly) into playful pop. As with *15 Big Ones*, Wilson served as producer; unlike with *15 Big Ones*, his compositional confidence was growing (*Love You* is often regarded as a Brian Wilson solo album). He played most of the instruments, and he wrote or co-wrote all 14 songs. The material ranges from gaudy rockers to shimmering ballads, from moments of quiet observation to rowdy uproar – and from downright awkwardness to leftfield brilliance (the latter sometimes within the same song).

Wilson didn't overthink anything, however, operating more than ever on intuition and raw impulse. He rotated singers (brothers Carl and Dennis, wife Marilyn, Mike Love, Al Jardine) astutely, experimented more than ever with melodic textures, lashing dynamics, and oddball time signatures, and drenched the music in a newfound love of synthesisers. The best example of that is "I'll Bet He's Nice," where a Minimoog keyboard rains little pellets of irony onto Wilson's sobering, lovelorn ballad of emasculation.

As ever, hopeful romance is central to Wilson's peace of mind, and earnest desire dominates the record's second half. "Let's Put Our Hearts Together", puts Wilson's bare-throated voice upfront alongside that of his wife Marilyn, a deft blend of sweetness and melancholy. "The Night Was So Young", meanwhile, is *Love You*'s finest track, with the lyrics mixing desire and doubt, tracing the protagonist's every internal psychological twist. Carl Wilson's vulnerable lead vocal gives way to brotherly harmonies in the chorus, lifting the song into a familiar, dreamy Beach Boys stratosphere.

*Love You* may not have resulted in the kind of commercial traction those in Brian Wilson's circle were seeking (No 28 in the UK; No 53 Stateside). But tracks like "The Night Was So Young", which soon begat deeply moving ballads of romance turned asunder such as "Still I Dream of It" and "It's Over Now" (intended for *Adult/Child*, finally released on 1993's *Good Vibrations: Thirty*

*Years Of The Beach Boys*) prove that Wilson's songwriting was simultaneously reaching new emotional lows and new artistic heights.

But it's the album's startling oddities – cuts with virtually no precedent in Wilson's or anyone else's canon – that race to the top of *Love You*'s listening experience. Built on bass-and-piano interplay and a waltz-time melody, "Solar System" is his tour of the cosmos, and its artless optimism make it hard not to smile along. It's like the greatest kids song you ever heard. "Johnny Carson", meanwhile, is a riot. Writing from experience, from what Brian knew best in the early 1970s – the isolated security of his bedroom with the TV on – the song is not so much a teenage symphony to God as an isolated (maybe terrified) grown man's symphony to America's favourite entertainer.

Unlike many Beach Boys albums post-*Pet Sounds*, *Love You* is strangely consistent (if consistently strange) and further highlights abound. "Mona" conjures the doo-wop 1950s, namechecks Phil Spector, and pounds its repetitive melody into the listener's brain, though Dennis Wilson sings as if he needed a bit more hangover recovery time. "Honkin' Down the Highway", the album's lone single, may seal the deal for dumbest-ever road song. Still, it overcomes its simple-mindedness with pure guile, brilliantly ingratiating vocals, and a circus-like instrumental backdrop.

Album opener "Let Us Go On This Way", is an organ-heavy rocker with a garage-rock flavour; its angelic "*God, please let us go on this way*" tagline marks it as some kind of weird answer song to "God Only Knows". "Good Time" is another strong one, but something of a cheat. A leftover from the *Sunflower* sessions seven years earlier, it – in light of the appearance of Wilson's gloriously clear twentysomething voice – hints at the passage of time. Yes, "Good Time" must be forgiven its sexist bent, but it is quintessential Beach Boys, the downbeat verses exploding into one of the group's finest feelgood choruses. Then there's "Ding Dang", which out-weirds the whole shebang. A 59-second boogie riff, mysteriously co-written with Roger McGuinn, it simply has to be an inside joke. Maybe it served as Brian's transcendental escape from it all.

> WILSON OPERATED MORE THAN EVER ON INTUITION AND RAW IMPULSE

Given its outlier status, and the late-1970s pop trends toward disco, metal and punk, *Love You* could never truly have gained traction as The Beach Boys' new direction. By the time Reprise nixed its follow-up, Wilson's solo *Adult/Child*, later in 1977, the "Brian's Back!" campaign fizzled, and The Beach Boys – in the midst of personal disintegration, legal and money troubles, ongoing drug problems and an artistic dead end – were hanging by a thread.

## Trackmarks LOVE YOU

1. Let Us Go On This Way ★★★
2. Roller Skating Child ★★
3. Mona ★★★★
4. Johnny Carson ★★★★★
5. Good Time ★★★★
6. Honkin' Down The Highway ★★★★
7. Ding Dang ★★
8. Solar System ★★★★
9. The Night Was So Young ★★★★★
10. I'll Bet He's Nice ★★★★
11. Let's Put Our Hearts Together ★★★
12. I Wanna Pick You Up ★★
13. Airplane ★★★★
14. Love Is A Woman ★★

**Label:** Brother/Reprise
**Producer:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** January 1970, March to November 1973 and October 1976 toJanuary 1977 at Brother Studios, Brian Wilson's home studio, California
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (vocals, keyboards, synths, drums), Al Jardine (vocals), Mike Love (vocals), Carl Wilson (vocals), Dennis Wilson (vocals)
**Additional musicians:** Marilyn Wilson (vocals), Bruce Johnston (vocals), Steve Douglas (horns)
**Highest chart position:** UK 28, US 53

RELEASED: AUGUST 22, 1977

# PACIFIC OCEAN BLUE

**The first Wilson solo album: wasted in many senses of the word, Dennis creates a racked and symphonic classic. Surf's *down*!** BY GRAEME THOMSON

## Critics' Verdict

**"Dennis Wilson is no great shakes as a singer. His strained vocals are often (and wisely) submerged in the mix. The overweening sentimentality of the lyrics are best left alone. Maybe next time around."**

IAN BIRCH, MELODY MAKER, SEPT 3, 1977

**"This benefits from the kind of lavish care and attention that has been sadly lacking on the last two BB albums... Dennis Wilson steps out of the murky myth and indicates there's much more to his talents than being the drummer in a rock'n'roll band."**

ROY CARR, NME, AUGUST 27, 1977

WHILE THE MOOD music surrounding the release of *15 Big Ones* and *The Beach Boys Love You* was designed to create the illusion that all was well once again within The Beach Boys camp, the first ever solo album by a member of the band had less conciliatory aims. The title track of Dennis Wilson's remarkable record shatters the oceanic idyll on which the band was founded. *"We live on the edge of a body of water,"* Wilson sings, raw and ragged. *"Warmed by the blood of cold-hearted slaughter."* There's plenty more where that came from. On *Pacific Ocean Blue*, surf's down.

A slacker before the phrase had been coined, on the album cover Wilson resembles a prototype for The Dude from *The Big Lebowski*. The dazed blankness in his eyes seeped into the music. Aimlessly pursuing women, hard drugs and alcohol, dismayed by the state of his marriage to Karen Lamm and the disarray within his band, Wilson created a bleached catalogue of existential despair, steeped in blues-rock, R'n'B and West Coast torch songs.

Wilson worked on the record on and off between 1975 and 1977 with his friend Gregg Jakobson, who co-wrote several songs. A couple more were collaborations with his wife. The epic opener, "River Song", was written some years earlier with his brother Carl, and had been performed occasionally by The Beach Boys in the early '70s.

The band had attempted to record the song in 1974, eventually abandoning it, but Wilson knew when he was onto a good thing. The version of "River Song" which opens *Pacific Ocean Blue* is astonishing, psychedelic gospel-rock fired to celestial heights by the vocal power of Alexander Hamilton's Baptist choir. Vast as the High Sierra mountains it hymns, "River Song" establishes a theme of sorts. *"Breaks my heart to see the city,"* sings Wilson in his rough bear of a voice, finally resolving to *"run away"*.

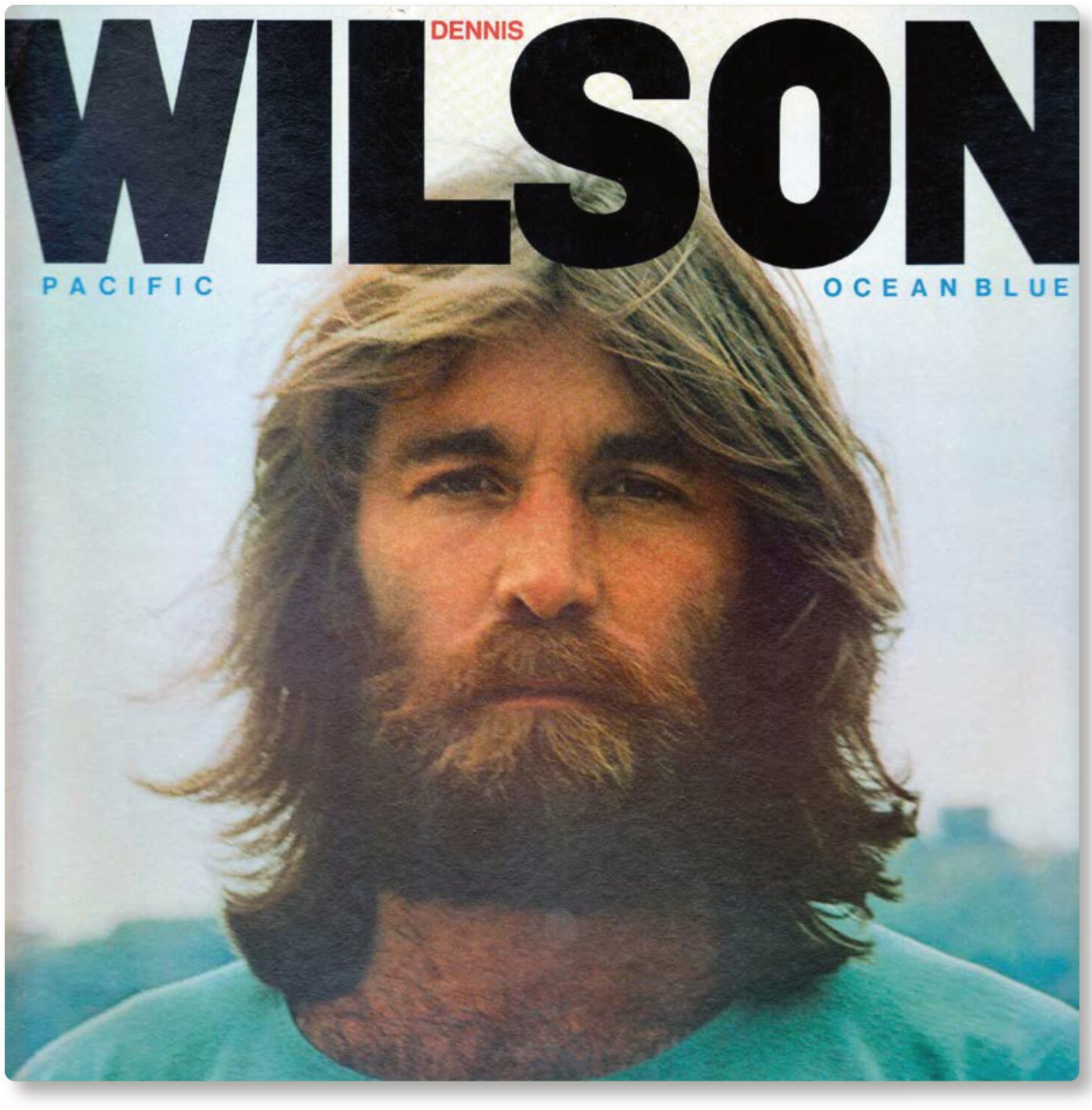
Still only in his mid-thirties, he was ground down by all the good times on tap in Los Angeles. The uproariously funky title track, written with Mike Love, reprises the theme of restoring a natural equilibrium, and "Rainbows" also seeks solace in elemental certainties.

The latter is one of the album's two unambiguously upbeat moments. The other is "What's Wrong", a loose boogie, slight but fun, and the closest *Pacific Ocean Blue* comes to the sound of Wilson's mother band.

The rest is a burnt-out, coked-up litany of loneliness, aimlessness and confusion. "Dreamer" is a superb blend of sleek '70s rock, loose R'n'B and troubled soul-searching (*"Do you wonder where you are?"*). The brass section is hot to the touch, the Clavinet bumps and grinds, and it all ends way too soon. "Friday Night" is rolling white funk soaked in wee small-hours dread. It goes nowhere, which is presumably the point. Even on the burbling yacht rock of "You And I", with its pattering rhythm and gently persuasive melody, Wilson sings *"no more lonely nights"* like a prayer.

Ravaged by hard living and the after-effects of a bar fight which damaged his throat, Wilson's voice is often little more than a raw scrape. It sounds particularly vulnerable on the quartet of piano ballads at the heart of the album, which flit between poetic despair and self-pity.

Wilson's marriage to Lamm was a mess, and at times *Pacific Ocean Blue* feels like an intrusion into private grief. The stark "Time" is hardly a song at all in the traditional




sense: it drifts, flares, then fades around a solitary mournful trumpet. The fiery, horn- and guitar-driven climax feels incongruous, though the sentiment – *"hold on"* – does not. On "Thoughts Of You", the harshness of Wilson's voice contrasts movingly with a twinkling piano figure and a slow sunrise of strings; the phased, orchestral middle section is both rousing and painful.

On "Farewell My Friend", an alcohol-soused cry in the dark, a disembodied synth sound spirals into the air like a distress signal. By the end, Wilson sounds barely there, discarded like driftwood thrown on to an empty beach.

The album concludes with "End Of The Show", another drifting exercise in lassitude which finds Wilson racked in the upper register. It builds to a bombastic climax, before ending with a burst of audience applause and a crafty snatch of a familiar harmony sound, as though reminding the listener that this is the shadowed flipside of The Beach Boys' idealised vision of sun, sea and sand.

WILSON'S RAVAGED VOICE IS OFTEN LITTLE MORE THAN A RAW SCRAPE

*Pacific Ocean Blue* sold poorly and only scraped into the *Billboard* Top 100. Wilson began a second solo record in 1978, but it was never completed. The turbulent soap opera surrounding The Beach Boys, not to mention truckloads of booze, cocaine and heroin, got in the way. It's a pity, because much of the material had obvious potential. Two songs, "Love Surrounds Me" and "Baby Blue", became highlights of The Beach Boys' 1979 album, *LA (Light Album)*. A tender duet with Carl, "It's Not Too Late", is terrific, while "Wild Situation" recalls The Band at their loosest.

Songs from these sessions were officially released as *Bambu* in 2008 as part of the long overdue reissue of *Pacific Ocean Blue*, which had been unavailable for almost two decades. By then, Wilson had been dead 25 years, drowning at Marina Del Rey in Los Angeles on December 28, 1983, after an all-day drinking session. The ocean wanted him after all.

## Trackmarks PACIFIC OCEAN BLUE

1. River Song ★★★★★
2. What's Wrong ★★★
3. Moonshine ★★★
4. Friday Night ★★★
5. Dreamer ★★★★
6. Thoughts Of You ★★★★
7. Time ★★★★
8. You And I ★★★★
9. Pacific Ocean Blues ★★★★
10. Farewell My Friend ★★★
11. Rainbows ★★★★
12. End Of The Show ★★★

**Label:** Caribou
**Producer:** Dennis Wilson, Gregg Jakobson
**Recorded:** February 12, 1975 to March 22, 1977 at Brother Studios, Santa Monica, CA
**Producer:** Dennis Wilson, Gregg Jakobson
**Personnel:** Dennis Wilson (vocals, piano, Hammond organ, keyboards, drums, perc, bass harmonica, tuba, violin, lap steel), Carli Munoz (piano, keyboards, synthesiser, perc), Carl Wilson (guitars, vocals), Bruce Johnston (vocals), Hal Blaine (drums) Chuck Domanico (bass) Ricky Fataar (drums), John Hanlon (lead guitar), James Jamerson (bass) Earle Mankey (guitar), Dean Torrence (bk vocals), Michael Andreas (sax, flutes, clarinet) Lance Buller (trombone, trumpet) Sterling Smith (keys), Tommy Smith (drums), Dave Hessler (bass), Ed Carter (guitars, bass), Mort Klanfer (bass), Bobby Figueroa (drums, congas), Wayne Tweed (bass), Manolo Badrena (perc), Janice Hubbard (oboe), Bill Lamb (trumpet, cornet, trombone), Charles McCarthy (sax), Eddie Tulejs (guitars, banjo, mandolin), Sid Sharp (live strings ensemble), Gayle Levant (harp), Alexander Hamilton's Double Rock Baptist Choir (vocals, bk vocals), Billy Hinsche, Trisha Roach, Baron Stewart, Jim Dutch, Karen Lamm-Wilson, Robert Lamm (bk vocals)
**Highest chart position:** UK – , US 96

RELEASED: OCTOBER 2, 1978

# MIU ALBUM

**Can a life-enhancing spell at the Maharishi International University, Iowa, inspire a group in disarray? Well...**

**BY JASON ANDERSON**

## Critics' Verdict

"Old surfers never die, they meditate instead. MIU stands for Maharishi International University, where this album was recorded. If the ancient giggling one was hoping for a dose of free publicity, he's come unstuck with a vengeance."

GRAHAM LOCK, NME OCTOBER 14, 1978

"How tragic that Brian is saddled with other people's lack of imagination: that he should be reduced to the role of a hack, setting his impassioned melodies and arrangements to laughably juvenile lyrics."

RICHARD WILLIAMS, MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 7, 1978

THE BAND'S 22ND studio album and final for Reprise before catching their next wave with CBS, *MIU Album* has no lack of forced good cheer over the course of its 32 minutes. The effect, however, can be grim. Comprising two innocuous covers, a few not-entirely-embarrassing originals and several travesties, it may be enough to crush the spirit of the most stalwart defender of The Beach Boys in the 1970s. Even Brian Wilson biographer Peter Ames Carlin decried it as "the most cynical, spiritually void work the group ever produced", calling it one of the worst records made by a major act. Buyers at the time ignored it – *MIU Album* peaked at No 151 in the US and didn't chart in the UK.

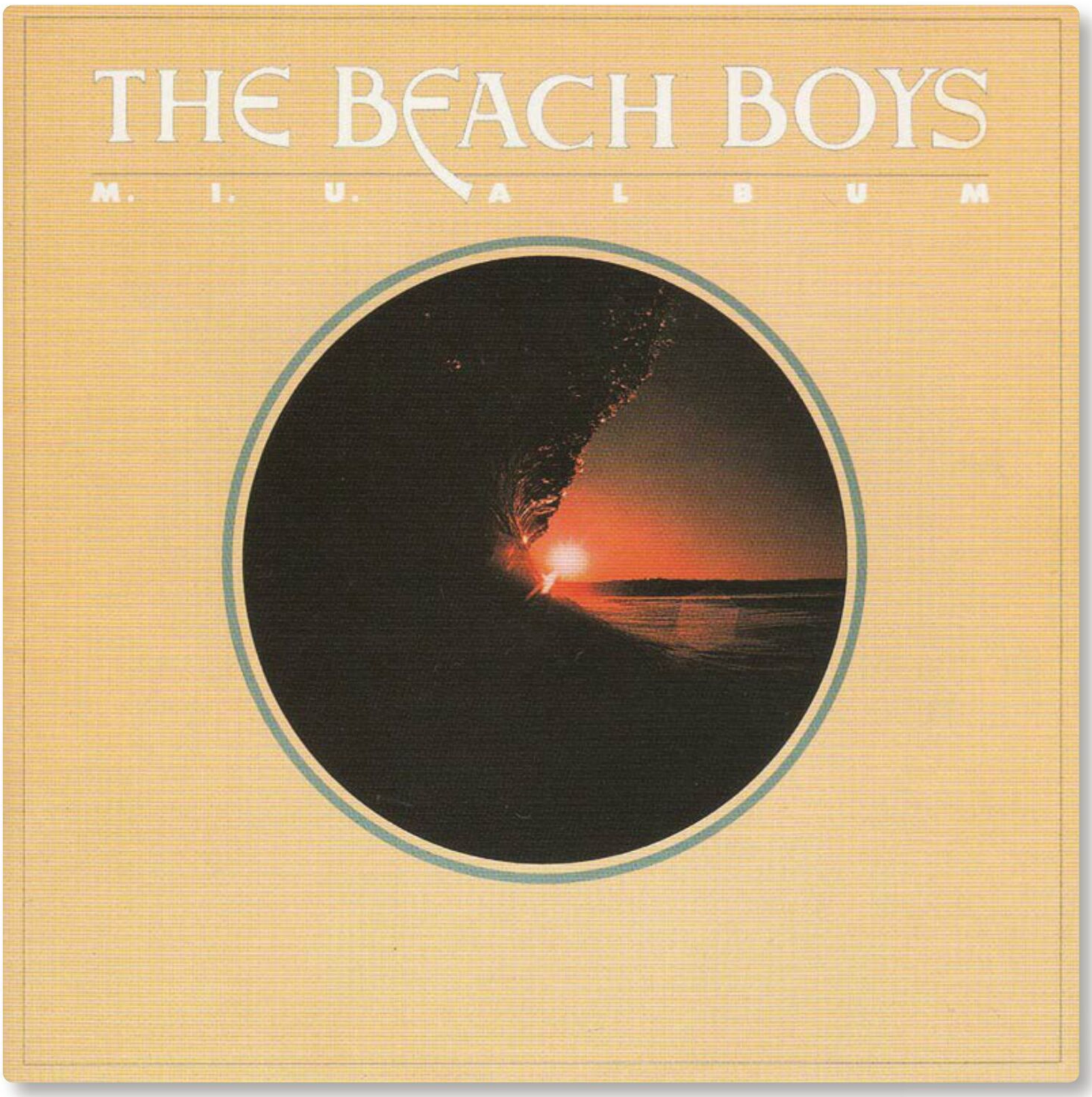
Nevertheless, it could've been worse, even if that piece of faint praise applies to so many of the band's efforts to stay afloat. What with the decent commercial performance of *15 Big Ones* and Brian Wilson's burst of creativity and confidence through the making of *Love You*, the band was actually in half-decent shape in early 1977, and Brian began sessions for another album only five days after wrapping up work on *Love You* in January. The new album was to be titled *Adult Child* (or *Adult/Child* according to some spellings) and would feature a mix of new songs, covers and leftovers from recent albums, such as "Games Two Can Play" and "HELP Is On The Way" from *Sunflower*.

Apparently, he hoped some of the songs might catch the fancy of Frank Sinatra. Perhaps with that aim in mind, he enlisted Four Freshmen arranger Dick Reynolds – who'd last worked with *The Beach Boys' Christmas Album* in 1964 – on four songs done in a big-band swing style, including a rendition of the jazz standard "Deep Purple".

Brian's scheme was probably doomed even if *Love You* had been the hit they needed, and prompted a renewal of hostilities within the band. Upon hearing the demos for *Adult Child*, Mike Love reputedly had this question to ask of his cousin: "What the fuck are you doing?"

Reprise's response was much the same when *Adult Child* was submitted and rejected late that summer. Scrambling to get another album together to finish out the band's contract, Mike Love and Al Jardine took the reins away from Brian. Love decided that it was better for the band to work in a place where they wouldn't have so many distractions (or drugs), so he built a recording space at the Maharishi International University, a non-profit "consciousness-based" educational institution that promoted the many applications of Transcendental Meditation. Though founded in Goleta, California, in 1973, it had taken over the campus of a defunct college in Fairfield, Iowa, where it still operates as the Maharishi University Of Management. (Weird but true: Love's fellow TM devotee David Lynch oversees the school's graduate film programme.)

However spiritually nourishing The Beach Boys' attempts at cleaner living may have been, it left them completely devoid of ideas. Opening track "She's Got Rhythm" is a typically mystifying example. "*Last night,*" Brian trills in his falsetto in the very first line, "*I went out disco dancing!*" While it's oddly heartening to imagine Wilson out enjoying himself in the year of "Le Freak" and "Stayin' Alive", this assertion was implausible for reasons beyond the likely lack of nightlife options in Iowa. For one thing, the music provides absolutely no indication that Brian Wilson had ever heard disco. Instead, the story of an encounter with a "*foxy girl*" is accompanied by bland sock-hop shtick and an incongruous middle section whose resemblance to "Wouldn't It Be Nice" made it a painful reminder of just how far the band had fallen. It would be another year before The Beach Boys made their first bona-fide stab at disco with Bruce Johnston's remake of "Here Comes The




Night". In the meantime, there are plenty of other depths to be plumbed.

One issue is the essentially featureless nature of the music and production by Jardine with Ron Altbach, the former frontman of "Dancing In The Moonlight" hitmakers King Harvest and a member of The Beach Boys' touring band. To be fair, Jardine acquits himself well on bland but passable versions of "Come Go With Me" and "Peggy Sue", both of which were recorded before Fairfield. Though somewhat sluggish, "Pitter Patter" is a fun throwback to the sound of *Today!*, delivered with enthusiasm by Love and Jardine. Dennis Wilson's performance on "My Diane" – a Brian ballad with the album's best vocal arrangement – has glimmers of the forlorn majesty of the best of *Pacific Ocean Blue*. And besides being a passably fetching piece of yacht rock of the Pablo Cruise school, "Match Point Of Our Love" suggests that Brian would've been wise to employ tennis analogies in his songwriting more often.

But the rest can be agonising. Given how ruthlessly The Beach Boys mined the aborted projects *Smile* and *Landlocked* to fill the records they somehow managed to finish, it's surprising how little of *Adult Child* appears here. In fact, the only song to appear in both albums' tracklistings is "Hey Little Tomboy", a wrong-headed effort that takes the tendencies of *Love You*'s "Roller Skating Child" to an uncomfortable extreme. Sounding like the creepiest uncles ever, Brian and Mike Love deliver advice to a blossoming adolescent on the ways of men and women. "*Hey little tomboy, I've had my eyes on you/ Thinkin' what a girl you could be/Mmm, I smell perfume, let's try some cut-off jeans/Look at all the changes I see.*" It gets worse.

THE BEACH BOYS' ATTEMPTS AT CLEANER LIVING LEFT THEM DEVOID OF IDEAS

Evidently unsatisfied with Iowa's dramatic vistas, The Beach Boys were dreaming of more exotic locales. A daft confection by Jardine and Love, "Kona Coast" heaps praise on Hawaii. Meanwhile, "Belles Of Paris" sends listeners to the City Of Lights, where they can watch "*belles jeunes filles and the handsome gendarmes*". As Love insists in the song's farcical Franglais, "*C'est très jolie en Paris in spring.*"

A co-write between Altbach and his former King Harvest bandmate Ed Tuleja, "Winds Of Change" ends this sad affair with a strings-laden pile of sentimental gloop whose cascading vocal harmonies can't disguise the poor condition of Brian's voice.

Then again, it's hard to imagine that any musical endeavour could convincingly conceal the state of disarray and despair in the Beach Boys' camp. *MIU Album* proves that there are some things that Transcendental Meditation just can't fix.

## Trackmarks MIU ALBUM

1. She's Got Rhythm ★★
2. Come Go With Me ★★★
3. Hey Little Tomboy ★
4. Kona Coast ★★
5. Peggy Sue ★★★
6. Wontcha Come Out Tonight ★★★
7. Sweet Sunday Kinda Love ★★
8. Belles Of Paris ★★
9. Pitter Patter ★★★
10. My Diane ★★★
11. Match Point Of Our Love ★★★
12. Winds Of Change ★

**Label:** Brother/Reprise
**Produced:** Al Jardine, Ron Altbach
**Recorded:** October 1976, November 1977 to June 1978 at Maharishi International University, Iowa; Brother Studios and Wally Heider Studios, California
**Personnel:** Alan Jardine (vocals, guitar, bass), Mike Love (vocals), Carl Wilson (vocals, guitar), Brian Wilson (vocals, piano, electric piano), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums)
**Additional musicians:** Ron Altbach (piano, electric piano, organ, percussion, synthesiser, horns), Gary Griffin (piano, electric piano, organ, synthesiser, string arrangements), Ed Carter (guitar, bass), Billy Hinsche (guitar), Mike Kowalski (drums, percussion), Chris Midaugh (steel pedal guitar), Michael Andreas (sax, horn arrangements), Charles Lloyd (sax), Lance Buller (trumpet), John Foss (trumpet), Rod Novak (saxA), Charlie McCarthy (sax), Bob Williams (sax), Roberleigh Barnhardt (string arrangements)
**Highest chart position:** UK –, US 151

RELEASED: MARCH 19, 1979

# LA LIGHT

**Drugs, divorce, internal divisions – and disco! As the lives get messier, the music gets even smoother.** BY SAM RICHARDS

## Critics' Verdict

"Undoubtedly the longest holding operation in living memory, the Boys have wasted their energies on delaying tactics instead of coming to terms with reality."

ROY CARR, NME, APRIL 7, 1979

"*LA Light* is comprised of short, melancholy, exquisite ballads. That they communicate irony without bitterness, sadness without hopelessness, is the mark of their art."

PETE WINGFIELD, MELODY MAKER, MARCH 31, 1979

THE BEACH BOYS reached 1979 in a state of acute dysfunction almost comically at odds with the frictionless Californian fantasy they continued to peddle in their songs. The band were split into two warring factions dubbed the 'free-livers' (Dennis and Carl Wilson) and the 'meditators' (Al Jardine and trainee levitator Mike Love). The critical success of Dennis Wilson's 1977 solo album *Pacific Ocean Blue* had aggravated tensions between the two camps, but it didn't bring Dennis much solace. Having finally ended his volatile marriage to Karen Lamm, he was shacked up with Fleetwood Mac's Christine McVie, leeching off her to fund his spiralling drug habit. Carl's marriage was also on the rocks.

Brian Wilson, meanwhile, was barely there at all. His fragile mental state exacerbated by his wife's affair with his minder, he spent most of his waking hours attempting to block out the world with a combination of alcohol, heroin, cocaine (often supplied by Dennis) and any kind of pills he could lay his hands on. He arrived at the *Light Album* sessions directly from San Diego's Alvarado Community Hospital, where he'd been detoxing for six weeks after being found unconscious in the gutter, following his latest bender.

Not that you'd have inferred any of this from listening to the songs. *LA (Light Album)* was another Beach Boys whitewash, sweeping all their issues under a carpet of lush harmonies and spotless production. The Beach Boys' lucrative new contract with CBS stipulated that Brian write and produce 70 per cent of the band's material, but his first action after arriving in Miami was to fall asleep on the studio floor. After three weeks of going through the motions, he finally suggested bringing back Bruce Johnston, who'd recently produced albums for David Cassidy and Jack Jones. Inevitably, the final album veered towards the middle of the road.

It's not clear who decreed that "Here Comes The Night" should be the lead-off single. A belated attempt to board the disco bandwagon, overseen by guest producer Curt Boettcher, it was booed when the band aired it during promotional dates at Radio City Music Hall in March 1979. It sealed *LA*'s fate another hapless Beach Boys folly, when actually there is plenty to enjoy here, if you are prepared to accept a certain degree of slick insincerity.

Certainly, fans of *Pacific Ocean Blue* would be daft to overlook *LA*, which features two Dennis Wilson compositions originally destined for the never-completed follow-up, *Bambu*. It might have taken some strong-arm tactics from Mike Love to persuade Dennis to give them up for the group, but their presence saves *LA* from being a frothy irrelevance. Dennis' messy personal life at the time is exemplified by the fact that one of his songs is dedicated to (and co-written by) his wife, Karen Lamm, while the other supposedly features the uncredited vocal harmonies of new girlfriend McVie. But at least he seemed able to channel his personal issues into his art to profitable effect.

"Love Surrounds Me" is a complex, layered affair, beginning with Dennis forlornly singing *"On my own again/Left alone again."* As he begins to recall the touch of his departed lover, the drums and bass kick in with a tight, reggae-influenced shuffle, over which is added flashes of Minimoog. There's a heavenly choral breakdown between verses, before the song reaches a sunnier climax. Dennis' solo version is available on the *Pacific Ocean Blue* deluxe edition, but arguably this punchier mix is superior.

"Baby Blue" again uses the group's harmonies as an instrument in itself, alongside strident piano chords,

twinkling guitar arpeggios and strings. It's essentially two songs in one, with Dennis' vocal section – bearing a passing resemblance to "Let It Be" – bookended by two sung beautifully by Carl. Again, it's a pointer to what The Beach Boys ought to have been doing all the time: employing their harmonies to more creative and impressionistic effect, rather than as window-dressing on run-of-the-mill pop fare.

Carl also wasn't averse to mining his personal life for inspiration. "Angel Come Home" is a song of forgiveness directed at his soon-to-be-ex wife Annie, although it's Dennis' terrific lead vocal – ravaged but still rich – that ensures the sentiment hits home. Carl's other songs, "Full Sail" and "Goin' South", are both wistful slowies about getting away from it all, the epitome of what would later be dubbed 'yacht rock'.

> ENGULFED BY CRISIS, THEY SUMMONED UP AN ALBUM OF LUSH, UNRUFFLED ADULT POP

BRIAN is no more than a ghostly presence on *LA*. He's credited with co-writing the elegant album opener "Good Timin'", although the song probably dates back to the mid-'70s. He also has a co-write on the controversial "Here Comes The Night", but that's only because it's a reworking of a song from *Wild Honey*. The idea of The Beach Boys going disco was not so ridiculous – it had worked for the Bee Gees, after all. But after a promisingly weird Vocoder intro, "Here Comes The Night" descends into generic orchestral disco glitz and continues in that vein, via an unpleasant saxophone break, for almost 11 minutes.

Unlike most of The Beach Boys' '70s albums, *LA* did actually yield a hit, Al Jardine's "Lady Lynda" reaching No 6 in the UK (although it failed to chart Stateside). Based around Bach's "Jesu, Joy Of Man's Desiring", it manages to be both clever and cornball at the same time. However, the wooden spoon goes to Mike Love for the horrifically twee "Sumahama", a forerunner to "Kokomo" in terms of sheer rinky-dink banality.

Critics at the time reacted to *LA* with scorn. "It's worse than awful, it's irrelevant," barked *Rolling Stone* – and in the year of *Unknown Pleasures*, *Armed Forces* and *Metal Box* you can certainly see their point. But divorced from that context, it's possible to appreciate this album's escapist qualities on their own merits, along with some of Dennis and Carl Wilson's finest vocal performances.

Engulfed by crisis on all sides, you could argue that The Beach Boys' ability to summon up an album of lush, unruffled adult pop verged on the heroic.

## Trackmarks LA LIGHT

1. Good Timin' ★★★★
2. Lady Lynda ★★★★
3. Full Sail ★★★
4. Angel Come Home ★★★★
5. Love Surrounds Me ★★★★★
6. Sumahama ★
7. Here Comes The Night ★★★
8. Baby Blue ★★★★
9. Goin' South ★★★
10. Shortenin' Bread ★★

**Label:** Brother/Caribou/CBS
**Recorded:** July 1978 to January 1979 at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida
**Produced:** Bruce Johnston, The Beach Boys, James Guercio, Curt Boettcher
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (vocals, piano), Carl Wilson (vocals, guitar), Al Jardine (vocals, guitar), Dennis Wilson (vocals, drums, keyboards), Mike Love (vocals), Bruce Johnston (piano, vocals)
**Additional musicians:** Joel Peskin (alto saxophone), James Guercio (bass), Joe Chemay (bass), Mike Maros (Clavinet), Bobby Figueroa (drums), Gary Mallaber (drums), Mike Baird (drums), Jimmy Lyons (guitar), Wah Wah Watson (guitar), Richie Zito (guitar), Ed Carter (guitars, bass), Sterling Smith (harpsichord), Steve Forman (percussion), Victor Feldman (percussion), Carlos Munoz (piano), Bob Esty (synthesiser), Phil Shenale (synthesiser)
**Highest chart position:** UK 32, US 10

RELEASED: MARCH 24, 1980

# KEEPIN' THE SUMMER ALIVE

**Keepin' the band alive. Dennis walks out. The rest muddle on, with increasing desperation.** BY PETER WATTS

## Critics' Verdict

"Pop music is a funny term: Pop: an abbreviation of popular (which The Beach Boys still are) and the sound made by a bursting balloon. That's more like it"
NME, MARCH 5, 1980

"The record has an air of such desperate happiness about it, punctuated by its cloying sincerities, that it's an effort to even play it."
JON WALL, MELODY MAKER, MARCH 29, 1980

FOLLOWING THE MISERABLE chart position of *LA (Light Album)*, The Beach Boys were hustled straight back into the studio and this time told, once again, to get more action out of Brian Wilson. Never an easy task, it was agreed that the best way to do this was to cocoon Brian in a familiarity that might provide both comfort and inspiration. So in the summer of 1979 everybody headed back to Western Studio 3, with old session men and even an old mixing board pressed into service. The sessions, engineered by Chuck Britz, saw the band work through a number of covers at Brian's insistence. These lasted four days and produced two useable songs, but also seemed to kickstart something from Brian. He went on to write a handful of songs for the new album in sessions that took place from October 1979 to February 1980 at Daryl Dragon's studio in San Fernando and later at Al Jardine's Big Sur barn, using Love's mobile studio.

Brian Wilson's contribution is arguably *Keepin' The Summer Alive*'s strength. It is, undeniably, a patchy selection of fairly random songs, with contributions taken from all over including the archives, but Brian at least provides a bridge between the different eras, making the segue from, say, 1979's "Sunshine" to 1969's "When Girls Get Together" feel almost seamless. The other positive factor is the sound. Although some of the production is very much of the era, it still sounds consistently, even self-consciously, like a Beach Boys record.

But that's also the major problem. There's no getting away from the fact this was a difficult time for The Beach Boys, something Dennis Wilson seemed to realise when he walked away from the sessions at an early stage, citing the weakness of the material. Throughout *Keepin' The Summer Alive*, The Beach Boys seem to be wrestling with the knowledge that they are an anachronism. An attempt to confront this directly on the previous album with a disco version of "Here Comes The Night" had gone flat, but at least they'd been on to something. Disco had, in some ways, updated the spirit of optimistic hedonism that The Beach Boys had long exploited, and there was something there they could work with. If only they could find a way to balance it with Brian's naïvety, which left them looking like ingénues in the face of disco's confident ribaldry.

Opening track "Keepin' The Summer Alive" begins with a tentative disco feel, but it doesn't last, and the band spend much of the album using their past as an insurance policy rather than stepping stone. As Joe Walsh's guitar guides the song into soft rock territory, Carl Wilson insists, rather desperately, that they are *"trying to keep the summer alive"* – with the emphasis on *"trying"* – and the song is flecked with nods to the past, most notably Mike Love's backing vocals, knowingly reprised from "Louie Louie".

"Keepin' The Summer Alive" was one of two songs written by Carl Wilson and Randy Bachman, formerly of The Guess Who and Bachman-Turner Overdrive, and recorded at Bachman's studio. The second, "Livin' With A Heartache", is cosy soft country that goes nowhere. Carl Wilson was the only Beach Boy involved and, released as a single, it failed to chart. In between come a pair of Love-Brian Wilson tracks, "Oh Darlin'" and "Some Of Your Love". The former, an upbeat ballad, is bathed in strings and has a solid enough structure, but has a turgid vocal from Carl and fatally self-referential backing vocals – *"God only knows/How I love only you."*

Improvement comes on "Some Of Your Love", a Love/Brian Wilson holdover from the 1977 sessions for the *MIU Album*, which is pretty bouncy, has unusually strong

harmonies and passes pleasingly enough. The first side ends with a clunker. "School Day (Ring! Ring! Goes The Bell)" was one of two songs recorded at Western Studio. Given that a cover of Chuck Berry's "Rock And Roll Music" had taken the band to No 5 four years before, this was briefly slated as a third single, but it never takes fire. Al Jardine is too polite as lead and the backing vocals are extraordinarily brainless.

BRIAN WILSON/Love co-write "Goin' On" begins the stronger second side and, for the first time, it feels the lyrics might be doing more than ticking boxes. *"I look in the mirror, it couldn't be clearer, something is gone from my eyes,"* it begins arrestingly, before moving back into fairly standard lost-lover territory. The song is spirited, though, with a committed vocal and production that sounds almost entirely of its time right down to the brief sax solo. Released as a single, it reached No 83. Next comes "Sunshine", a cut-and-shut job that began life at Western Studio as a cover of "Little Boy" by The Crystals, but later took on a kon-tiki/cod-reggae vibe as a purported Wilson/Love production. It leads into "When Girls Get Together", taken from the *Sunflower* sessions and featuring some experimental touches – a Marxophone provides the melody, Love and Brian Wilson sing slowly and in duet, while the lyrics are wide-eyed weird.

The strange, semi-mystical "Santa Ana Winds" was written for *LA (Light Album)* and intended to be part of a trilogy about Californian nature. Sung ably by Al Jardine with some help from Brian, it's simply presented and rather lovely.

**THIS ALBUM LEFT THE BAND BUFFETED, IGNORED AND DEPLETED**

This would be a nice place to leave things, but instead comes the misjudged "Endless Harmony", a rewrite of Bruce Johnston's 1974 B-side "Ten Years Harmony". Johnston takes lead and eulogises the *"ocean lovers who like to harmonise"*, *"cousins, friends and brothers who make their mothers cry"*, *"record-making, heart-breaking West Coast boys"*... you get the picture. The title's promise of an endless harmony sounds depressingly Sisyphean in this setting, even if the final vocal harmony is a thing of rare beauty, which hangs tantalisingly in the air.

*Keepin' The Summer Alive* charted higher than its predecessor, but sold fewer. It left The Beach Boys, buffeted, ignored and depleted, entering the 1980s looking ahead nervously towards how they might reach their 20th anniversary.

## Trackmarks KEEPIN' THE SUMMER ALIVE

1. Keepin' The Summer Alive ★★
2. Oh Darlin' ★★
3. Some Of Your Love ★★★
4. Livin' With A Heartache ★★
5. School Day (Ring! Ring! Goes The Bell) ★
6. Goin' On ★★★
7. Sunshine ★★★
8. When Girls Get Together ★★★
9. Santa Ana Winds ★★★★
10. Endless Harmony ★

**Label:** Brother/Caribou CBS
**Produced:** Bruce Johnston
**Recorded:** November 1969 to February 1980 at Rumbo Recorders, LA; Jardines Barn, Criteria Studios, Miami; Bachman Studio, Washington; United Western Recorders, California and Brian Wilson's home studio
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (vocals, piano, keyboards, synthesiser), Carl Wilson (vocals, guitar), Al Jardine (vocals, guitar), Mike Love (vocals), Bruce Johnston (vocals, keyboards), Dennis Wilson (drums)
**Additional musicians** Scott Mathews (drums, vocals), Steve Douglas (saxophone), Joe Walsh (guitar), Daryl Dragon (keyboard), Caleb Quaye (guitar), Gary Mallaber (drums), Joel Peskin (saxophone), Dick Hyde (trombone), Billy Walker (guitar), Chuck Findley (brass), Mike Meros (keyboards), Steve Ross (guitar), Ricci Martin (unknown), John Hobbs (keyboards), Bryan Garofalo (bass), Steve Forman (percussion), Igor Horoshevsky (cello), Bill House (unknown), Vince Charles (percussion), Ray Armando (percussion), Ricky Fataar (percussion), Efrain Toro (percussion)
**Highest chart position:** UK 54, US 75

RELEASED: JUNE 10, 1985 | AUGUST 28, 1989

# THE BEACH BOYS/ STILL CRUISIN'

**Fairlight synths. Culture Club, Stevie Wonder and Ringo. Ry Cooder, John Phillips and The Fat Boys. Oh, and "Kokomo"... The 1980s.** BY PIERS MARTIN

## Critics' Verdict

"The warm Californian sun is still beating down on the rolling surf, but nowadays The Beach Boys look like they'd prefer a round of golf. The music has aged gracefully, but it does sound very old; echoes from another era."

SEAN O'HAGAN ON *THE BEACH BOYS*, NME JUNE 29, 1985

"The Beach Boys have by and largely contrived to ignore most of contemporary music, preferring to continue mining their golden era."

ZIYAD GEORGIS ON *THE BEACH BOYS*, MELODY MAKER, JUNE 29, 1985

THE 1980S SHOULD have been the decade that saw The Beach Boys turn their fortunes around, but after the lacklustre *Keepin' The Summer Alive*, things went from bad to worse. Dennis Wilson's tragic death on December 28, 1983, at the age of 39, ripped the heart out of the band, who by that point found themselves adrift and out of touch. Wilson embodied a perceived carefree spirit of The Beach Boys, even though his chronic alcoholism cost him his career – he'd walked out of sessions for *Keepin' The Summer Alive* – his wife and ultimately his life. Drunk on a friend's boat off the coast at Marina Del Rey, he drowned while diving in a futile bid to retrieve personal items he'd thrown overboard from his own yacht, once moored nearby, a few years earlier.

It's hard to say if this galvanised the remaining members into recording a new album, but it certainly brought them together. With no clear consensus on where to head next and another record badly needed, Bruce Johnston suggested working with the young English producer Steve Levine, who was at the top of his game having helmed three hugely successful Culture Club albums.

Johnston had befriended the then teenage tape operator Levine in 1977, while the Beach Boy produced pop fops Sailor's *Checkpoint* in London, and reckoned that Levine would now be in a position to give The Beach Boys a modern new sound and – who knows? – a competitive contemporary edge.

The former Levine achieved – recorded in London and LA using a Fairlight, synthesisers and digital multi-tracks, *The Beach Boys* is their first album to be digitally produced and their first CD release – but he could not control the quality of the material. "They hadn't been in the studio for quite a while and they were very rusty. They needed to get back on the treadmill and do some work," Levine told Beach Boys biographer Mark Dillon. Nevertheless, Levine produced a competent Beach Boys album, complete with the sonic trappings of the day. For the most part, programmed drums replace Dennis Wilson, whose absence is barely felt – aside from a dedication on the back cover – on another collection of corny songs about girls and surfing. Slickly furnished with synthesisers, crisp rhythms and enhanced harmonies, the band fashion their own brand of elastic-waisted yacht rock that never leaves the safety of the harbour. Opener and lead single "Getcha Back" – a US hit reaching No 25 – coasts by on swells of creamy vocals before a volley of forgettable wine-bar synth-funk ("It's Gettin' Late", "Crack At Your Love", "Maybe I Don't Know") and Bruce Johnston's ballad "She Believes In Love Again" pad out Side One.

Star turns on the record are absorbed into the silky blandness. Boy George and Roy Hay of Culture Club contribute the touching "Passing Friend", sung by Carl Wilson, while Stevie Wonder dials in the schmaltzy "I Do Love You". Ringo Starr drums on a few numbers. Amid such smooth production and oily sentiment, the raw emotion in Brian Wilson's voice on "I'm So Lonely" is startling. His three songs on the album initially included a writing credit for his psychiatrist, Eugene Landy, but these were removed at a later date.

Given recent events, only Carl's "Where I Belong" could be construed – at a stretch – as a song for older brother Dennis: *"In my mind we're together/Even when I'm alone/ My heart leaves you never/Never will our love grow old,"* he sings, as Westlife harmonies swirl.

A month after its release, the band played Live Aid in front of a global TV audience of two billion and aired nothing from their new album. Levine had updated the band's sound, but they were still playing the same old songs – and now their contract had run out with CBS, who

had no desire to renew it. They returned to Capitol for 1989's *Still Cruisin'*, one of the least essential Beach Boys LPs, and arguably not even a proper album. A collection of recent tracks that had appeared in Hollywood movies with three classics bolted on at the end ("I Get Around", "Wouldn't It Be Nice" and "California Girls" – it was used in *Soul Man*, remember?), *Still Cruisin'* represents the point where what soul that remained had been sucked from the band. But why should they care when the leisurewear calypso of "Kokomo" had given them their first US No 1 since 1966?

INCLUDED in Tom Cruise vehicle *Cocktail*, "Kokomo" may have positioned The Beach Boys as an easy-listening cruise ship ensemble, but it contains their most infectious melodies for some time and at least finds them trying something vaguely new; Ry Cooder even plays slide guitar on it. The wretched Fat Boys hook-up "Wipe Out" introduced the band to a new audience, but the video, heavily rotated on MTV, made them appear more doddery than they possibly were. The far hipper Run-DMC were slated to collaborate, but Mike Love hustled in The Fat Boys before that could happen.

Most surprising is "Somewhere Near Japan", a slab of Fleetwood Mac-style AOR that replaces the usual facile lyrics about cars and girls with a narrative concerning the junkie daughter of its co-songwriter John Phillips. Honeymooning in the Far East, she had called her father requesting money for drugs. When asked for her location, she replied, "Uh, somewhere near Japan..."

**THE STAR TURNS ARE ABSORBED INTO THE SILKY BLANDNESS**

Drifting in and out of the lineup, Brian Wilson's sole new contribution, the innocuous "In My Car", again features a co-write by Landy. And the less said about the cod-reggae of "Island Girl", the better.

Thanks to "Kokomo", *Still Cruisin'* reached a respectable No 45 in the US charts and, against all odds, The Beach Boys became a bankable proposition again. They had survived the decade, but the fast pace and new technology of the '80s had exposed their shortcomings. It would take a miracle – or a few savvy business decisions – to restore their credibility now. With the '90s fast approaching, perhaps they just weren't made for these times.

## Trackmarks THE BEACH BOYS / STILL CRUISIN'

**The Beach Boys**
1. Getcha Back ★★★
2. It's Gettin' Late ★★
3. Crack At Your Love ★★★
4. Maybe I Don't Know ★★
5. She Believes In Love Again ★★★
6. California Calling ★★★
7. Passing Friend ★★
8. I'm So Lonely ★★★
9. Where I Belong ★★★★
10. I Do Love You ★★
11. It's Just A Matter Of Time ★★

**Label:** CBS
**Produced:** Steve Levine
**Recorded:** Red Bus Studios, London; Westlake Audio, LA
**Personnel:** Mike Love (vocals), Al Jardine (vocals, guitars), Carl Wilson (vocals, keyboards, guitars), Brian Wilson (vocals, keyboards) Bruce Johnston (vocals, keyboards)
**Additional musicians:** Steve Levine (Fairlight and drum programming), Terry Melcher (keys), Gary Moore (guitar, Synth Axe) Ringo Starr (drums), Stevie Wonder (drums, bass, keys, harmonica) plus session musicians
**Highest chart position:** UK 60, US 52

**Still Cruisin'**
1. Still Cruisin' ★★
2. Somewhere Near Japan ★★★
3. Island Girl ★
4. In My Car ★★
5. Kokomo ★★★
6. Wipe Out ★★
7. Make It Big ★★★
8. I Get Around ★★★★★
9. Woudn't It Be Nice ★★★★★
10. California Girls ★★★★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Producers:** Terry Melcher, Brian Wilson, Al Jardine, Albert Calbrera, Tony Moran
**Recorded:** 1988–1989 at Red Barn Studios, Big Sur; United Western Recorders, LA
**Personnel:** Mike Love (vocals), Al Jardine (vocals, guitars), Carl Wilson (vocals, keys, guitars), Brian Wilson (vocals, keys), Bruce Johnston (vocals, keys, bass)
**Additional musicians:** Van Dyke Parks (acc), Ry Cooder (slide), Joey Brasler (gtr), Vinnie Colaiuta (drums), Jeffrey Foskett (backing vocals, acoustic gtr), Adam Jardine, Matt Jardine (backing vocals)
**Highest chart position:** UK – , US 46

RELEASED: AUGUST 3, 1992 | AUGUST 19, 1996

# SUMMER IN PARADISE/ STARS AND STRIPES

**Mike Love takes total control for a rapping disaster. Then: The Beach Boys go country... The 1990s.** BY ROB HUGHES

IT'S HARD TO imagine what Mike Love was thinking when he devised *Summer In Paradise*. If we're being kind, it could be argued that it was a noble attempt to recapture The Beach Boys' embryonic zest in honour of *Surfin' Safari*'s 30th anniversary. But that seems excessively charitable given the appalling quality of the finished product. *Summer In Paradise* is, quite simply, the sorriest album of The Beach Boys' twilight years.

There's certainly precious little to recommend it. Overseen by ex-Byrds producer Terry Melcher (co-author of 1988's surprise hit "Kokomo"), it remains the only Beach Boys studio album to lack any input from Brian Wilson. The group's de facto leader was by then in the legal process of extricating himself from the control of psychologist Eugene Landy. 1992 was also the year that Love decided to sue Wilson for what he claimed were lost royalties, eventually bagging a reported $13 million. It was therefore left to Love to steer *Summer In Paradise* like his own pet project, taking lead vocals on the bulk of its dozen tracks and co-writing all of its original songs with Melcher.

The album's only claim to innovation is its use of Macintosh Pro Tools as a recording format, though this turns out to be a far from commendable tactic. The entire thing suffers from being chokingly synthetic, right down to the sterile thud of its programmed drums. There's a host of guest musicians who probably should've known better, including Van Dyke Parks and guitarist Danny Kortchmar, while Bruce Johnston is the only actual Beach Boy to play on the record. The others, namely Al Jardine and Carl Wilson, are content to share what remains of the vocal spots.

Picking out highlights is a tricky task. Love and Melcher's selection of covers are as puzzling as they are redundant, from the aimless lollop of Sly & The Family Stone's "Hot Fun In The Summertime" or The Shangri-Las' "Remember (Walking In The Sand)" to poor remakes of Beach Boys classics "Surfin'" and "Forever". The former, with its 'state-of-the-art' studio trickery, sounds like it's been desecrated by Jive Bunny. And Dennis Wilson's poignant "Forever", described by brother Brian as "the most harmonically beautiful thing I've ever heard" in its 1970 incarnation, becomes a heavy-handed power ballad, sung by US sitcom actor John Stamos.

But such criticisms pale next to the new tunes. Love might have been forgiven if his lyrics had addressed the nuances of time and the practicalities of shoring up The Beach Boys' legend in middle age. Instead, the 51-year-old chose to sing about an endless summer with a plentiful supply of surf and sex, from the vantage point of an emotionally arrested teen. All of which, believe it or not, came wrapped up in a clumsy eco message with even clumsier references to the group's back catalogue. *"Surfers recycle now, don't you know/Like everyone from California to Kokomo,"* Love pipes on the execrable title track. *"We're gonna keep on rockin'/And raisin' world consciousness/We gotta fix this mess."*

These lyrics, however, sound positively profound next to those of "Summer Of Love". You might think Love is being self-parodic were it not for the earnestness of his low-register rap – yes, *rap* – as he intones over some midtempo muzak: *"People all around the world in every nation/Like to get together for some excitations/If you're a girl appreciates her recreation/Why don't you let me take you on a love vacation."* The song ended up on *Baywatch*, for which Love and the boys wiggled along with a phalanx of bikini-clad babes.

It probably comes as no surprise to discover that *Summer In Paradise* is the worst-selling album of The Beach Boys' career. Indeed, so feeble were its sales figures – some estimates suggest it sold less than a thousand copies – that it supposedly led to its distributor filing for bankruptcy. The

record has been out of print ever since. The band might have learned a thing or two about the dangers of crass commercialisation when it came time for a follow-up, *Stars And Stripes Vol 1*, but they did a great job of hiding it. Issued four years later, in the summer of 1996, the album was built on the flimsiest of premises: a bunch of Beach Boys evergreens given a country makeover. "Nothing's much more Americana than The Beach Boys and country music combined," Mike Love explained, not entirely convincingly, to *VH1*.

AT least Brian was back for this one, co-producing the sessions with Joe Thomas. Perhaps encouraged by the success of the Status Quo collaboration "Fun, Fun, Fun" (a Top 30 hit earlier that year), the idea was to have a special guest sing the lead vocal on each tune, while The Beach Boys provided harmonies. The results, alas, were hardly better than *Summer In Paradise*.

On the plus side, Willie Nelson's wizened warble is an ideal fit for "The Warmth Of The Sun", with its stark arrangement and idling harmonica. And the Eagles' Timothy B Schmit delivers a pretty faithful version of "Caroline, No" that benefits from a Jimmy Webb string arrangement. But the vast majority of the album is utterly forgettable. Lorrie Morgan's "Don't Worry Baby" transforms a beautiful thing into joyless country-pop. Kathy Troccoli contrives to make chuggy bombast of "I Can Hear Music", the misery compounded by a saxophone solo. And Toby Keith offers jarring proof that growly Nashville country and Californian teen-pop should never mix, on a thoroughly dispiriting "Be True To Your School".

> THE BEACH BOYS, IT SEEMED, HAD NOTHING LEFT TO SAY

Tammy Wynette's laudable take on "In My Room", meanwhile, was kept back for a second volume of *Stars And Stripes*. Unsurprisingly, the project didn't make it any further. Sales of the album were better than its predecessor, but not enough to warrant an encore. It was also The Beach Boys' last studio offering to feature Carl Wilson, who died of lung cancer 18 months after its release.

The Beach Boys, to all intents and purposes, had nothing left to say as the millennium approached. It wasn't until 2012 that they resurfaced with a fresh batch of originals.

## Trackmarks SUMMER IN PARADISE / STARS AND STRIPES

**Summer In Paradise**

1. Hot Fun In The Summertime ★★
2. Surfin' ★
3. Summer Of Love ★
4. Island Fever ★
5. Still Surfin' ★★
6. Slow Summer Dancin' (One Summer Night) ★★
7. Strange Things Happen ★★★
8. Remember (Walking In The Sand) ★★
9. Lahaina Aloha ★★
10. Under The Boardwalk ★★
11. Summer In Paradise ★★
12. Forever ★

**Label:** Brother
**Produced:** Terry Melcher
**Recorded:** Late 1991 to 1992 at Surfman Location Studios/ Melcher Studios, Carmel, CA, and Martha's Vineyard, MA
**Personnel:** Mike Love, Al Jardine, Carl Wilson (vocals), Bruce Johnston (vocals, keyboards)
**Additional musicians:** Adrian Baker (vocals), Rod Clark (bass guitar), Craig Fall (guitar, mandolin, keys bass), Danny Kortchmar (guitar), Sal Marullo (conga drums), Ken Mary (drums), Roger McGuinn (12-string guitar, vocals), Terry Melcher (keys, vocals), Sammy Merendino (drums), Van Dyke Parks (accordion, keys), Joel Peskin (sax), John Stamos (vocals, drums), Richard Titus (keys), Keith Wechsler (keys, drums), John Weston (pedal-steel)
**Highest chart position:** UK –, US –

**Stars And Stripes**

1. Don't Worry Baby ★
2. Little Deuce Coupe ★★
3. 409 ★★
4. Long, Tall Texan ★★
5. I Get Around ★★
6. Be True To Your School ★
7. Fun, Fun, Fun ★★
8. Help Me, Rhonda ★★★
9. The Warmth Of The Sun ★★★
10. Sloop John B ★★
11. I Can Hear Music ★
12. Caroline No ★★★

**Label:** River North Records
**Produced:** Brian Wilson and Joe Thomas
**Recorded:** October 5, 1995 to June 12, 1996 at Pedernales Studio, Texas; Capitol Studios, CA; Masterfonics, Emerald Sound Studios and Sound Stage Studios, Nashville
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson, Al Jardine, Mike Love, Carl Wilson, Bruce Johnston (harmony vocals)
**Additional musicians:** Willie Nelson, Timothy B Schmit, Toby Keith, Lorrie Morgan, James House, Junior Brown, Doug Supernaw, Sawyer Brown, Ricky Van Shelton, T Graham Brown, Collin Ray, Kathy Troccoli (lead vocals)
**Highest chart position:** UK –, US 101

THE BEACH BOYS ALBUMS

RELEASED: 1988-2015

# BRIAN SOLO

## A troubled genius escapes. *"Love and mercy, that's what you need tonight..."* BY JOHN LEWIS

A GROUP'S TALENTED frontman is usually the first to go solo, so it seems bizarre that Brian Wilson was pretty much the last Beach Boy to release his own album. Bruce Johnston and David Marks's solo careers date back to 1963, Blondie Chaplin's to 1976. Even Brian's less talented relatives pipped him to it: Dennis Wilson's *Pacific Ocean Blue* came out in 1977, Mike Love's *First Love* the following year and Carl Wilson's eponymous LP in 1981.

But Brian always channelled his creative instincts into The Beach Boys, and it was only the chaotic circumstances of the early '80s that led him to reluctantly launch a solo career. In November 1982 he was nominally fired from his own group – for the sake of his own mental health, according to Mike Love – and ended up in the care of a somewhat controversial psychiatrist. Dr Eugene Landy set about taking total care of Brian's entire life, including his musical career.

The sessions for 1988's **Brian Wilson** SIRE ★★★ were rumoured to have cost $1 million, bankrolled by an indulgent Sire Records boss Seymour Stein who was delighted to see Wilson back in action and keen to oversee his triumphant comeback. However, when you consider the conditions under which the album was recorded, it's a wonder that anything was ever committed to tape. A clearly disturbed Wilson was under round-the-clock surveillance by Landy's "eyes and ears" Kevin Leslie, the blond-haired "surf Nazi" who insisted on being present in the studio at all times, taking notes, tape-recording all of Wilson's conversation, regularly reporting back to Landy and even rigging up an intercom system to bug studio dialogue.

The album's producers included Russ Titelman, whose partnershipwith Brian dated back to 1965, when they co-wrote the magnificent "Guess I'm Dumb" for Glen Campbell. Titelman tried his best to make sense of the chaos, which he said was "less like making a record, more like a Marx Brothers movie". "Landy has no qualifications to make creative decisions," said Titelman at the time, though it didn't stop the sinister shrink from claiming songwriting credits for six of the 11 songs, with his girlfriend Alexandra Morgan claiming two co-writes.

Still, the album does feature some fine compositions. The opening track and lead single, "Love And Mercy", is Brian's strongest melody in decades, upholstered by some gorgeous harmonies – try and filter out the gated reverb and the glutinous DX7 synth sounds that carbon date it and you're left with something that wouldn't sound out of place on *Wild Honey*. "Melt Away" is another fine composition in the *Pet Sounds* style, a strong melody backed by a chugging keyboard, an elegant glockenspiel part and some decisive tubular bells. The album's final track is an eight-minute epic entitled "Rio Grande". Apparently deemed important enough for the Warner Bros boss Lenny Waronker to co-produce, it's designed as a "Heroes And Villains"-style cinematic piece in eight parts, its invocations of Sergio Leone and John Ford slightly hampered by the dinky 1980s synth voicings.

> MAKING *BRIAN WILSON* WAS "MORE LIKE MAKING A MARX BROS MOVIE"

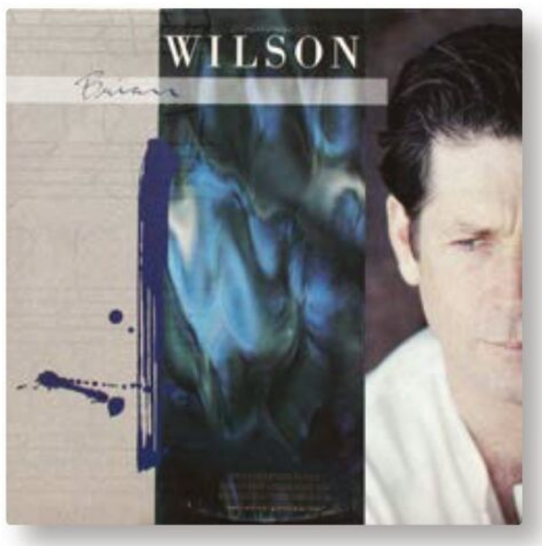
Numerous potential collaborators had meetings with Wilson in preparation for this record, including Bob Dylan, Lindsey Buckingham, John Sebastian, Van Dyke Parks, Carole Bayer Sager and Harry Nilsson (even Prince was tentatively approached when in a neighbouring studio).

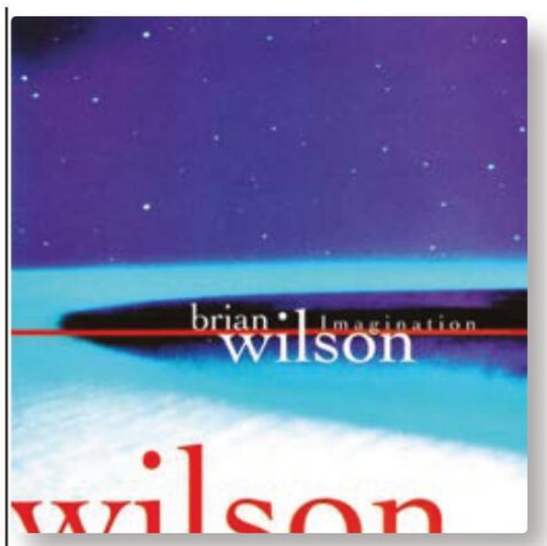
Despite the titanic budget, a heavy PR campaign and some good-to-ecstatic notices, the album stalled at No 56 in the States and didn't even reach the UK Top 100. Wilson continued to make music in his newly built studio into the early 1990s – including plenty of tracks with Andy Paley and an unreleased album called 'Sweet Insanity'. Judging from the tracks that are readily available on the internet – including "Smart Girls", which features Brian rapping – it's probably best left in the vaults.

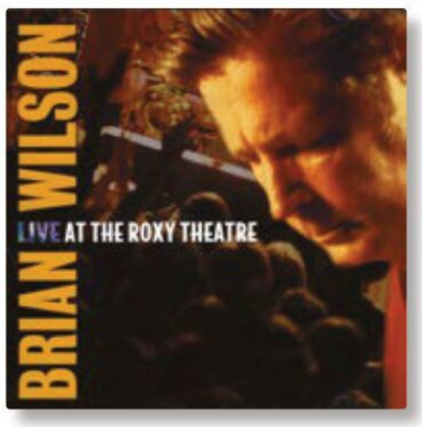
When the next physical release did finally land, in August 1995, it wasn't really a fully fledged album at all but the soundtrack to a Don Was documentary on Wilson. **I Just Wasn't Made For These Times** MCA, 1995 ★★ shouldn't really be judged as a stand-alone release, more as a low-key "unplugged" session featuring versions of some much loved Wilson songs written over the previous 30 years.

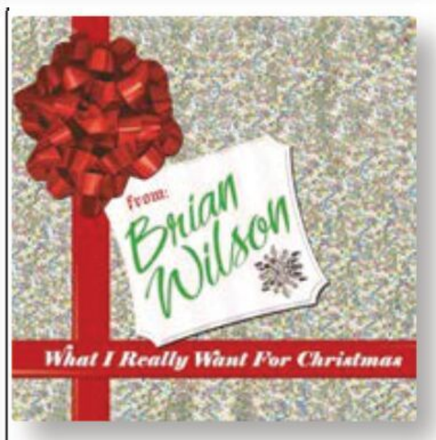
There are two songs from *Brian Wilson* – rather lovely, acoustic, stripped back versions of "Love And Mercy" and "Melt Away" – but by this time Landy's name had been taken off the songwriting credits. There's also a fascinating piano/vocal demo of "Still I Dream Of It", a gorgeous ballad written and recorded in 1976 but rejected by Mike Love. Elsewhere, Brian mines his late-'60s golden age: *Pet Sounds*' "Caroline No" features an elegant flute solo by David McMurray; elsewhere

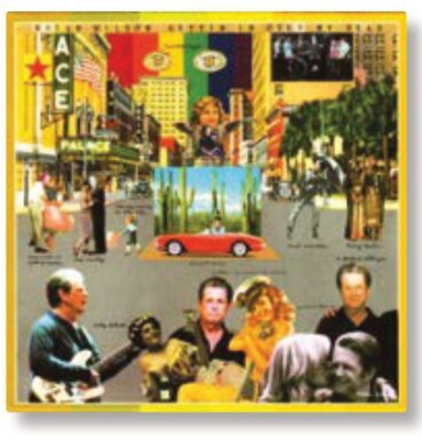
Under surveillance: publicity shot for Wilson's 1988 debut solo album

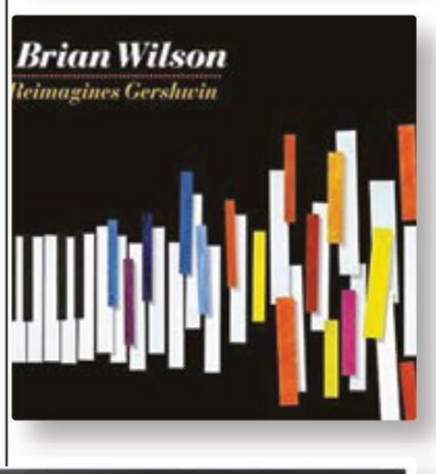


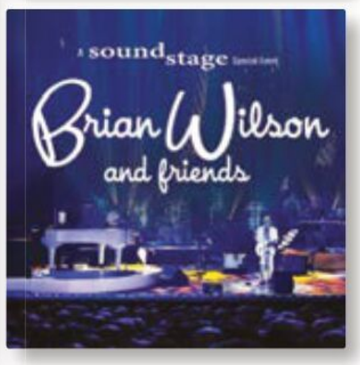


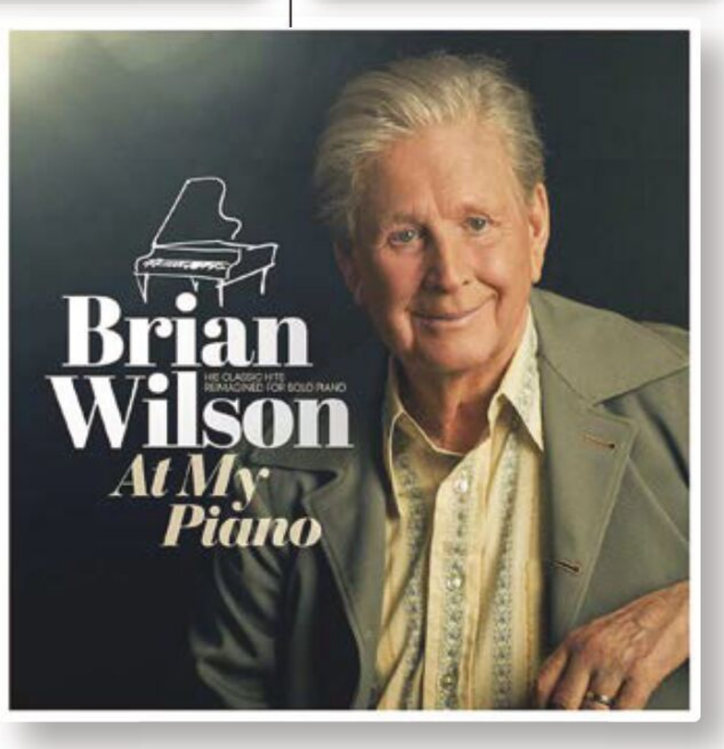












are some pretty but largely pointless versions of "Let The Wind Blow" from *Wild Honey*, "Wonderful" from *Smile*, "Til' I Die" from *Surf's Up*, and "This Whole World" from *Sunflower*.

The album came out in August 1995, not making the US chart and scraping to No 59 in the UK. Even less commercially successful was a "proper" album of original material that was released only two months later. **Orange Crate Art** WARNER BROS, 1995 ★★★ saw Wilson teaming up once more with his old pal Van Dyke Parks. Wilson does not contribute at all to either the music or the lyrics ("Why am I even here?" he asked Parks when he sat down for his first vocal take), and it certainly sounds more like a VDP solo album in the vein of *Song Cycle*, only featuring Wilson's burnished, melancholy bark and a few Beach Boys harmonies. On "Sail Away", when Wilson sings Parks's fantasy of sailing away into a Caribbean idyll (*"You go and get the telephone/give it a real good yank and thank God we're alone/in a tropical zone"*), you get the impression that Wilson would rather be sitting alone in a darkened room.

While it helps if you're a fan of Van Dyke Parks's serpentine chord sequences, angular melodies and waspish lyrics, it's a fine album, pitched in some odd hinterland equidistant from Stephen Sondheim, Martin Denny and Donald Fagen's *The Nightfly*. The best moments – the title track, "Movies Is Magic" and two of the songs co-written with lyricist Michael Hazelwood, "Summer In Monterey" and "This Town Goes

Down At Sunset" – are drenched in a specifically Californian nostalgia, pitched in some idealised 1950s dreamland. Parks has since re-recorded several of these tracks – most memorably a tango version of the rather lovely "Hold Back Time" on his 2013 LP, *Songs Cycled* – but he remains frustrated by the album's lack of success. "It cost $350,000 to make and sunk without trace," he says.

It's certainly a lot better than Wilson's follow up album, **Imagination** GIANT RECORDS, 1998 ★★, produced by Joe Thomas. "She Says That She Needs Me", co-written with Carole Bayer Sager and Russ Titelman, is by far the best track on the album, a chugging piano set against an elegant woodwind arrangement with some devious and heartwrenching chord changes.

Elsewhere, the new material just isn't any good. Opener "Your Imagination" is almost suspiciously happy, lacking that hint of lovelorn melancholy that often sits at the heart of even the jolliest surfer songs. By contrast, the LP closer, "Happy Days" is a slightly demented nursery rhyme, played on a celeste, which gets more and more discordant as it mirrors Wilson's harrowing lyric. *"I used to be so far from life/no one could help me/not even my wife/oh god the pain that I've been going through..."*

OBSESSIVES WILL BE interested to hear re-recordings of two old Beach Boys songs. The sophisticated "Let Him Run Wild" was written with Mike Love for 1965's *Summer Days* album, although Brian never much cared for his own falsetto vocal. "Keep An Eye On Summer", written with Bob Norman and originally recorded in 1963, is played at the same chugging 6/8 but inserts one killer chord into the verse.

Wilson was clearly having problems writing new material and needed a new creative partnership to reboot his career. It came at a 1999 Hollywood charity bill when, alongside Alex Chilton and Apples In Stereo, he witnessed LA power-pop outfit the Wondermints playing a version of "This Whole World" from the Beach Boys' album *Sunflower*. "What is this?" he said. "It sounds amazing!" He quickly set about meeting the band and, after they accompanied him for few local radio appearances, guitarist Nick Walusko, keyboardist Darian Sahanaja, bassist Probyn Gregory and drummer Mike D'Amico became the core of Wilson's new backing band. Together they set about rearranging Wilson's classic material with a fidelity to the writer's original material that was so clearly lacking from his fellow Beach Boys. "If I'd had these guys in 1967 I could have toured *Smile*," he said.

The first document of this rebirth is **Live At The Roxy Theatre** BRIMEL/OGLIO RECORDS, 2000 ★★★★, a double album recorded in front of just 500 ecstatic fans at an intimate club on West Hollywood's Sunset Strip in April 2000. It follows the similar structure from all his live dates, which was to start with the earlier, surfy material and then move on to the heavy hitters from *Pet Sounds* and beyond. Brian sounds positively cheerful here, leading the call and response bits and joshing with the audience ("how long can you clap without hurting your hands?" he asks at one point). He positively howls his "favourite song ever, ever, ever" – Phil Spector's "Be My Baby" – at the top of his register with a passion that's lacking from so many of his studio albums.

The audience excitement is even more palpable on **Brian Wilson Presents Pet Sounds Live** SANCTUARY, 2002 ★★★★, a live document of the recreation that Wilson recorded live at London's Royal Festival Hall in January 2002 (although omitting the non-*Pet Sounds*-related first half of the show). Led by guitarist Jeffrey Foskett (a member of the Beach Boys touring band since the early 1980s), the Wondermints are joined by a crack team of sessionmen (including vibist/pianist Scott Bennett, bassist Bob Lizik, drummer Jim Hines and multi-reedist Paul Mertens). By now, these phenomenally talented multi-instrumentalists were able to recreate Beach Boy harmonies at will, and had truly mastered *Pet Sounds*' labyrinthine arrangements, grappling with glass harmonicas, vibraphones, tubular bells, glockenspiels, accordions, baritone sax and theremins.

The same team then set about tackling the seemingly impossible task of recreating the almost mythical *Smile* album. Released in September 2004, **Brian Wilson Presents Smile** NONESUCH ★★★★★ is a curious project – where Wilson, Darian Sahanaja and engineer Mark Linett set about rummaging through the Capitol archive in search of the discarded master tapes and then set about creatively recreating them, with Van Dyke Parks filling in the gaps and completing the lyrics. After painstakingly reassembling this Biblical scroll on ProTools they set up in a studio with the Stockholm Strings and recorded the entire piece in only four days. The result is as near as dammit to the actual Beach Boys' *Smile Sessions* that were eventually remastered and released seven years later – something that can only be the highest compliment to the project.

Sadly, however, this trio of terrific retro releases didn't seem to have much impact on Brian's ability to write a decent new song. **Gettin' In Over My Head** BRIMEL/RHINO, 2004 ★, was released just before the triumphant *Smile* recreation, and several big-name guests are on board to celebrate. Elton John huffs and puffs his way through the opener "How Could We Still Be Dancin'?"; Eric Clapton provides some heavy guitar for the squelchy, synth-assisted "City Blues"; and while it's quite touching to hear the voice of Wilson's old creative rival Paul McCartney on the middle eight of "A Friend Like You", the song itself sounds like a *Sesame Street* reject.

The chugging rock'n'roll number "Soul Searchin'", written for an unused Beach Boys tune and recorded by Andy Paley in 1995, features lead vocals by Carl Wilson (who died in 1998). There are also five songs revived from 'Sweet Insanity' – including the faintly irritating, Disney-like earworm "Make A Wish". Another 'Sweet Insanity' track called "Let's Stick Together" – originally recorded with Weird Al Yankovic on accordion – is reworked as "The Waltz", this time with Van Dyke Parks penning a rather touching little narrative that mines the world of genteel high-school dances. It's by some distance the best moment on a rather sad album.

**What I Really Want For Christmas** ARISTA, 2005 ★★ is Wilson's third crack at the seasonal album, following 1964's *Beach Boys Christmas Album* and its disastrous, unreleased 1977 follow-up. The 2005 session sounds exactly as you'd imagine it. A clutch of Christmas carols (all of them different from the ones on the 1964 LP) are wreathed in lavish, beautifully orchestrated Beach Boy harmonies. There are two originals – Bernie Taupin provides lyrics for the rather pretty title track (which sounds like a drumless Elton John song, performed by a barbershop choir), while "Christmasey" is a slightly aimless co-write with Jimmy Webb.

**That Lucky Old Sun** CAPITOL RECORDS, 2008 ★★★ is, like

## Critics' Verdict

"This is not wishful thinking. The textures, the forest of harmonies and Wilson's repowered pitch all say that the patient is cured and back near his best."

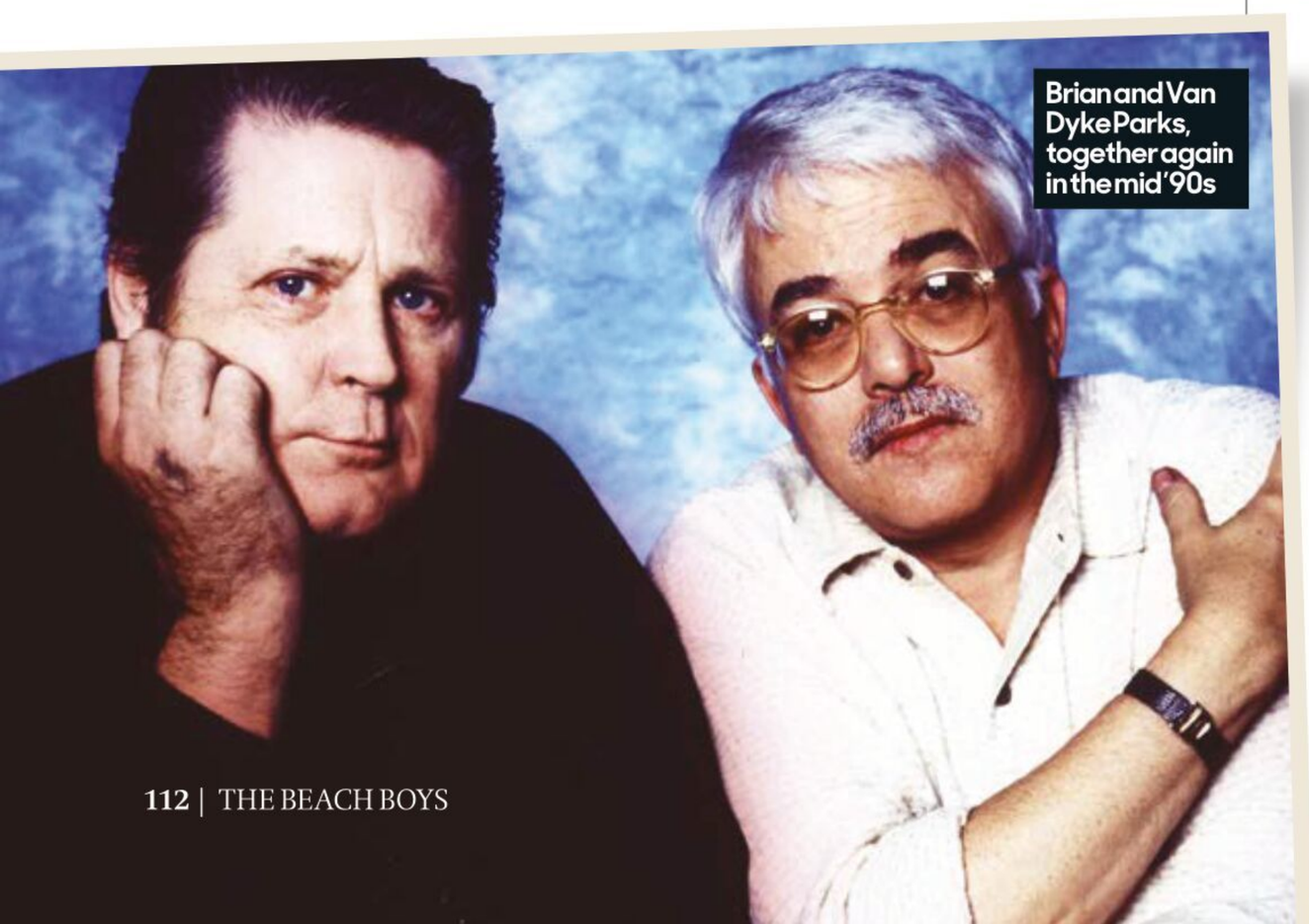
DAVID SWIFT ON *BRIAN WILSON*, NME, JULY 23, 1988

"Amazingly, Brian's impressively bare-souled readings of his back pages haven't been flattened under the weight of hired ponytails"

JOHNNY CIGARETTES ON *I JUST WASN'T MADE FOR THESE TIMES*, NME AUGUST 26, 1996

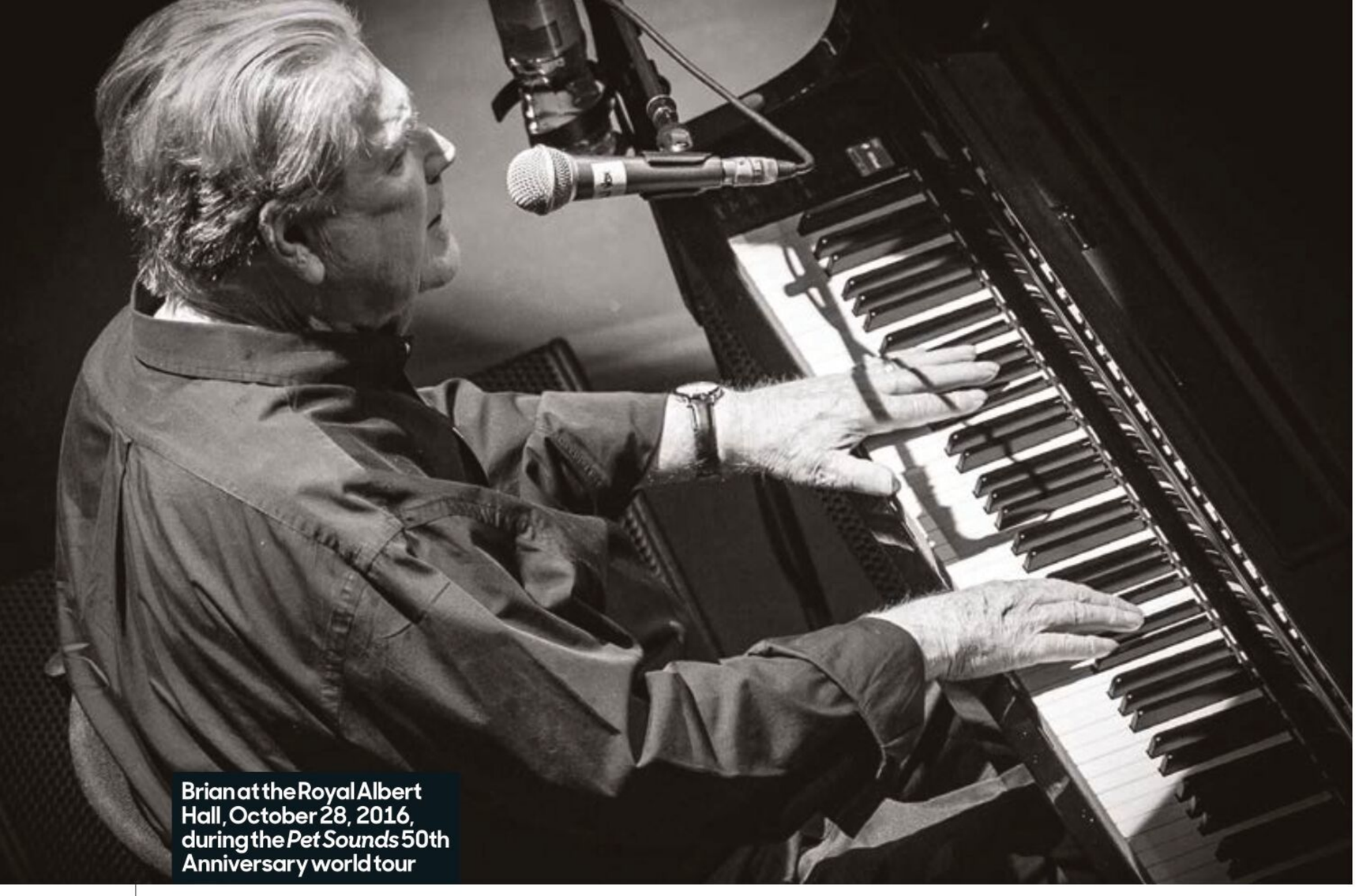
"The music – which is superb throughout – is old, barbershop, orchestral; there is a beautiful sense of America before rock'n'roll here."

DAVID QUANTICK ON *ORANGE CRATE ART*, NME, NOV 25, 1995



Brian and Van Dyke Parks, together again in the mid'90s

MARYANNE BILHAM PHOTOGRAPHY/REDFERNS



Brian at the Royal Albert Hall, October 28, 2016, during the *Pet Sounds* 50th Anniversary world tour

*Orange Crate Art*, another conceptual piece – a cinematic love letter to Los Angeles that recalls Woody Allen's tributes to New York. There are references to the Capitol Tower and the Hollywood Bowl; to smogs and freeways; to the Dodgers Stadium and Venice Beach. Even the rather banal, uptempo "Morning Beat" starts with one of Wilson's most wonderfully poetic lyrics: (*"The sun burns a hole through the 6am haze/ turns up the volume and shows off its rays/another Dodger blue sky is crowning LA"*).

The opening track – repeated as a leitmotiv throughout the album – is an old 1949 standard in which nature (*"the lucky old sun"*) looks on with indifference at human toil. It was penned by Beasley Smith and Haven Gillespie (whose hit from the same year "The Old Master Painter" was used prominently during *Smile*, segued with "You Are My Sunshine"). The song has been covered by countless American icons – from Louis Armstrong to Johnny Cash, from Ray Charles to Bob Dylan, from Dean Martin to Aretha Franklin – but Wilson makes it his own, with massed harmonies and heart tugging piano chords.

Van Dyke Parks is back on board, to write the elliptical, hipster prose that constitutes the narrative. He also co-writes "Live Let Live", providing playfully downbeat lyrics which makes light of the environmental catastrophe sown by humanity (*"creatures of God/let them abound/where they are found/let's get the hell outta here"*). It adds some much-needed salt to a rather syrupy waltz, something that's lacking from most of the other tracks of the album.

Some heartwrenching moments gape out through the Californian sunshine. The two best songs are the most spartan, piano-based numbers: the album's closer is a magnificent piano/vocal piece entitled "Southern California"; while "Midnight's Another Day" is a ravishing melody that earns comparisons with "Surf's Up", with a lyric of loss and renewal that matches the heartbreaking chord changes (*"all these people make me feel so alone"*).

In 2010, Brian Wilson signed with the Disney label to record two albums of covers. The first was an intriguing tribute to another of the twentieth century's great songwriters, George Gershwin, although **Brian Wilson Reimagines Gershwin** DISNEY 2010 ★★ fails in Brian's stated aim, which was to recontextualise Gershwin as a rock artist. In service of this aim, Brian gamely tries to rework Gershwin's elegant art deco compositions as rock'n'roll clapboard shacks. The best tracks – like the jaunty version of "I Got Plenty Of Nothin'", however, manage to match Gershwin's witty romanticism with the sophisticated chamber pop of *Smile* and *Pet Sounds*.

BEING SIGNED TO the Walt Disney label, it seemed natural for Wilson to record an album of cartoon covers. **In The Key Of Disney** WALT DISNEY, 2011 ★ could have been a decent album with a better choice of material but, instead of classics by the Sherman brothers et al, we get a load of dreary songs from more recent movies – two Elton John and Tim Rice stinkers from *The Lion King*, two sleazy and substandard Alan Menken songs, one ("Kiss The Girl") written with Howard Ashman from *The Little Mermaid*, the other ("Colors Of The Wind") written with Stephen "Godspell" Schwartz for *Pocahontas*. Two Randy Newman songs from the *Toy Story* trilogy ("You've Got A Friend In Me" and "We Belong Together") are ruined by that honking rock'n'roll arrangement of which Brian and the Wondermints seem overly fond. The barbershop version of "When You Wish Upon A Star" (from *Pinocchio*) that closes the album is beautiful, but it's a case of too little too late.

**No Pier Pressure** UNIVERSAL 2015 ★★★ is a return to form, of sorts. It started out as Beach Boys project, after Brian joined them on tour for the band's 50th anniversary celebrations. There were even plans to turn it into a three-volume set, complete with a song suite based on *That's Why God Made The Radio*. It eventually turned into a solo album, but one with former Beach Boys Al Jardine, David Marks and Blondie Chaplin all one board.

Their harmonies bolster Brian Wilson's Grandpa Simpson croak on a third of the tracks. David Marks and Al Jardine lend their harmonies to "What Ever Happened" and "The Right Time", Jardine features on "Tell Me Why", while Jardine and Blondie Chaplin are there for "Sail Away" (a belated sequel to "Sloop John B"). Al and Blondie also guest on the closing track, "The Last Song" – originally written for Lana Del Rey, amazingly – which is Brian's lament for the band's messy break up. *"If there was just another chance for me to sing to you,"* he pleads over a simple piano backing, *"There's never enough time for the ones that you love."*

WILSON NEEDED A NEW CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP TO REBOOT HIS CAREER

**Brian Wilson And Friends** BMG 2016 ★★★★ is a live album which fills in the gaps left by 2002's *Pet Sounds Live*, including the non-*Pet Sounds* tracks that he and the Wondermints play live. They're joined by ex-Beach Boys Al Jardine, Blondie Chaplin and Ricky Fataar, alongside star trumpeter Mark Isham, but the 19-track album is best enjoyed in partnership with the 26-track DVD, which supplements you with a heavenly version of "God Only Knows" and "On The Island", featuring Zooey Deschanel's She & Him.

**Playback: The Brian Wilson Anthology** RHINO, 2017 ★★★ is a decent compilation of tracks from his solo albums, from 1988-2015, along with two previously unreleased rarities: "Run James Run" is an out-take from *No Pier Pressure* where some schematic chord changes are transformed by heavenly vocal harmonies, while "Some Sweet Day" is a rather joyless slice of bubblegum pop recorded with Andy Paley in the early 1990s.

There are five, much better outtakes from the Andy Paley sessions on the soundtrack to Brent Wilson's documentary film **Long Promised Road** LAKESHORE RECORDS, 2021 ★★★, including the oddly punky "I'm Broke". It also features "Right Where I Belong" (a lovely co-write with My Morning Jacket's Jim James), a couple of inferior, if charming, versions of 1970s Beach Boys songs, a cover of Jimmie Rodgers' novelty "Honeycomb" and a tear-jerking live version of "In My Room".

Finally comes **At My Piano** DECCA 2021 ★★★ where Wilson plays stripped back solo piano arrangements of 15 of his classic songs. His playing is the very definition of what jazz musicians describe as "composer's piano" – unshowy, spartan arrangements that guide us through each song's unusual harmonic logic. Wilson is playing purely from memory but clearly using overdubs on some tracks (you'd need at least three hands to play his arrangements of "Good Vibrations", "Don't Worry Baby" and "Wouldn't It Be Nice", for starters). It's enchanting in short bursts, if a little snoozesome after a few tracks, but it will be useful for any wedding bands or cocktail pianists looking to identify the definitive chords to these magnificent, deathless, deceptively complicated songs.

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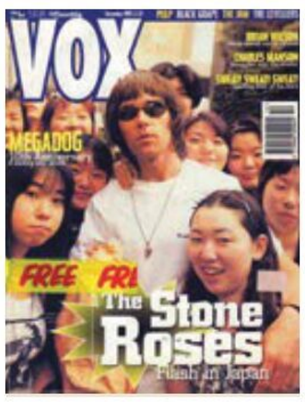
# "The Beach Boys are trying to destroy me!"

**1995.** Newly married and out of the clutches of "emotional gangsters", Brian Wilson has two fresh albums to promote, and plenty more new songs in the can. He also, though, has an ongoing battle with depression, a volatile relationship with his old bandmates, and a radical sense of humour. In an extraordinary interview, he tells ***JOHN MULVEY*** which Beach Boys he could beat up, offers $100 to get his songs on the radio, and reveals his secret: "If you abstain from having an orgasm for 10 years, you create a void in your brain!"

**VOX** DECEMBER 1995




NOWADAYS there is shagpile, not sand, beneath the piano legs. Business is conducted at the kitchen table, not in a tent. There are no addled, faux-mystical frauds hanging around, no lysergically charged leeches scuttling round his bed, no star-dazzled psychologists by his shoulder, no heavy-duty minders, no craven and insensitive businessmen picking at that royally fried flesh. No. Life for Brian Wilson is contented; as contented, perhaps, as it has ever been.

Some things, though, are the same. The voices still invade his head from time to time, even if the new medication is teaching them some discipline. The Beach Boys, naturally, are still "fucking assholes". And the music? Well, that's hardly changed, either, still retaining that astonishing beauty, that spirituality, that otherworldly naivety which was once, mistakenly, seen as something this remarkable man would grow out of.

*"Little surfer, little one, made my heart come all undone/Do you love me, do you, surfer girl?"*

He's singing now, sitting at the piano, hammering out a song he wrote some 33 years ago; its innocent sentiments would make most 53-year-old men shy away from it, ashamed. The voice is a little coarser, but there's still an amazing depth of feeling invested in every last resonating syllable; an adolescent lust transfigured by a yearning, a high melancholy and a profound sense of uncertainty at what the future will hold; and sunny optimism underpinned with doubt, as ever, but now augmented by a powerful, reconciling faith...

The chorus ends, slides into a new bridge, written to comfort the singer in one of his regular emotional slumps. "*God shines down his love and mercy/ For those in need tonight,*" he sings, with a passion and fervour almost strong enough to send the most defiant atheist spinning towards the nearest church. Beautiful? Damn near transcendental.

Finally the song finishes, and reality intervenes.

"If you put 'Surfer Girl' on the radio, I'll give you 100 bucks," says Brian Wilson, eyeing the tape recorder that's been whirring round all along. He laughs. "I was feeling a little blue because I thought maybe life had deserted me, so I wrote a fairly sorrowful song. You know, maybe we'll record it, but I think '*God shines down his love and mercy for those in need tonight*' is a little personal, a little heavy. I'd rather do something that was similar to 'Surfer Girl', but not quite that heavy. Because first of all the punk rockers, the young people, will say: 'Fuck The Beach Boys, they're into a prissy little trip like 'Surfer Girl'... how about some rock'n'roll? It's all fucked up, it's all screwed, deranged and hit to hell. Nobody can tell what's happening."

**"IT'S ALL FUCKED UP, IT'S ALL SCREWED, DERANGED AND HIT TO HELL. NOBODY CAN TELL WHAT'S HAPPENING"**
BRIAN WILSON

This is Brian Wilson in the summer of 1995. Newly wed, fat again and – after more than three decades of severe mental illness, shocking maltreatment and gross indulgence – in odd, stressed but relatively good shape. For the first time in seven years, there are new records to promote: understated, slick reworkings of old classics on *I Just Wasn't Made For These Times* and a vocals-only job on *Orange Crate Art*, his most famous, fated collaborator Van Dyke Parks' new homage to California. The pressure's on and, for a man who has spent nearly 30 years in emotional suspension, that can be hard to deal with.

Much of that time has been a nightmare, a succession of soul-squashing depressions punctuated by brutally unsuitable therapy and endless, acrimonious litigation. Sometimes, though, when he speaks, it's as if none of it has happened. It's as if we're back in the LA of the mid-'60s, talking to a man preoccupied with Phil Spector, The Beatles and his own

Smiley smile: Brian Wilson in Los Angeles, August 1995

enormous, mind-blowing music. It is, perhaps, one of the ways he deals with things. And another?

"I've got my secret here. I don't tell anybody my secret," confides Brian, still sitting by his piano. "I have a secret... I'll tell you anyway: I don't have any sex, OK? The secret is abstaining from orgasm. An Einsteinian formula that if you abstain from having an orgasm for, say, 10 years, you create a void in your brain. In other words, if you don't express an orgasm for 10 years, it's a long time, right? Most people think two weeks without an orgasm's a long time.

"And I did that, y'know? My dad told me in high school: 'Son, now you're gonna be going through a lot of hell as you grow up, and the one thing you should never do is you should not have orgasms and masturbate and you should not fuck with girls.' And I tried it out. I'd been jacking off all summer, y'know? And toward the end of the summer, I'm going into my junior year in high school and my dad lays that on me. I go there and I try it out and I say: 'What the fuck is this shit? Hey, wait a minute, man, I like *not coming* better than coming!' And I kept going that way for a long, long time and finally I came to the conclusion that I'm gonna tell people my secret. But I just don't want some chick to go: 'Oh, that's your secret? Well here, I'll make you come'... Ain't that a weird trip?"

Isn't it just...

AS FAR AS weird trips go, the story of The Beach Boys ranks as one of the weirdest in the well-frazzled history of rock'n'roll. Initially, it all seemed so simple: gentle, talented Brian Wilson corralled his two brothers Dennis and Carl, plus his cousin

STEFAN DE BATSELIER

Mike Love and a neighbour, Al Jardine, into a group. They meshed sweet, complex harmonies with the elemental rumble of early rock'n'roll, added lyrics that were paeans to the idyllic surf-cars-and-girls lifestyle of young, white, middle-class California, and – easy, easy – made some of the most blindingly great singles of all time.

Only The Beatles rivalled their popularity. But there were problems. The Boys' manager – the Wilsons' father, Murry – was a bullying, jealous failed songwriter who habitually interfered with the music, humiliated his sons and made appalling business decisions. And Brian's gentleness was increasingly revealed as emotional fragility. After several horrendous panic attacks, he stopped touring, experimented with hallucinogens and bedded down in the studio to work on ever-more ambitious music.

In 1966, he completed *Pet Sounds*, an album that still sounds so unbelievably lovely that the *NME* voted it the best album ever in 1993. The sheer scope of the music – intricate, dramatic and with an innate melancholy that perfectly complements the lyrics of fading innocence – set a new benchmark for rock'n'roll. It made anything seem possible. In response, The Beatles made *Sgt Pepper*, the concept album was thus invented and pretension was introduced to a new generation.

Meanwhile, Brian was taking things much further. He wrote a stunning, multi-faceted pocket-psychedelic symphony called "Good Vibrations" that became his band's biggest hit yet. Then he started work on a lavish album, *Smile*, that picked up where *Pet Sounds* left off, and threatened to revolutionise pop music completely. He called it, during work-in-progress interviews, his "Teenage symphony to God".

While the other Beach Boys continued their endless tour, Brian chose a brilliant young speed-freak, Van Dyke Parks, as his lyricist and co-pilot, who was at that time so poor he was "vaulting pay-toilets. I couldn't afford to change my mind."

*Smile*, though, was never finished. Brian's strange, obsessive behaviour worsened until he recorded "Mrs O'Leary's Cow"/"Fire" with an entire orchestra wearing fireman's helmets, then blamed the alchemic power of the music for starting a number of blazes in LA that same night. The other Beach Boys – especially the frequently thuggish and philistine lead singer, Mike Love – were baffled by, and hated, the freaky new music, haranguing Parks over his impenetrable lyrics.

"I think *Smile* was absolutely stellar for its time; it stretched the envelope. We were pushing the industry to do things," remembers Van Dyke Parks. "And Brian was the most courageous, innovative personality I've ever met in the recording studio. Bar none. He showed valour, it was like I was with a great warrior. When I was interested in being a great lover, he showed me, at that early age, that he was interested in being a great warrior. He brought me into a New Age Of Man. He did something very fraternal for me. It was... an important relationship for me. And I would like to think that courage is contagious."

Courage and genius notwithstanding, Brian Wilson suffered a terrifying psychological collapse that caused him to spend much of the next 20 years cowering in his bed, a bloated and traumatised casualty. The other Beach Boys – including wild brother Dennis, by now consorting with Charles Manson – took musical control, with Brian contributing fewer and fewer songs, still occasionally brilliant, but often simpler and unmistakably disturbed.

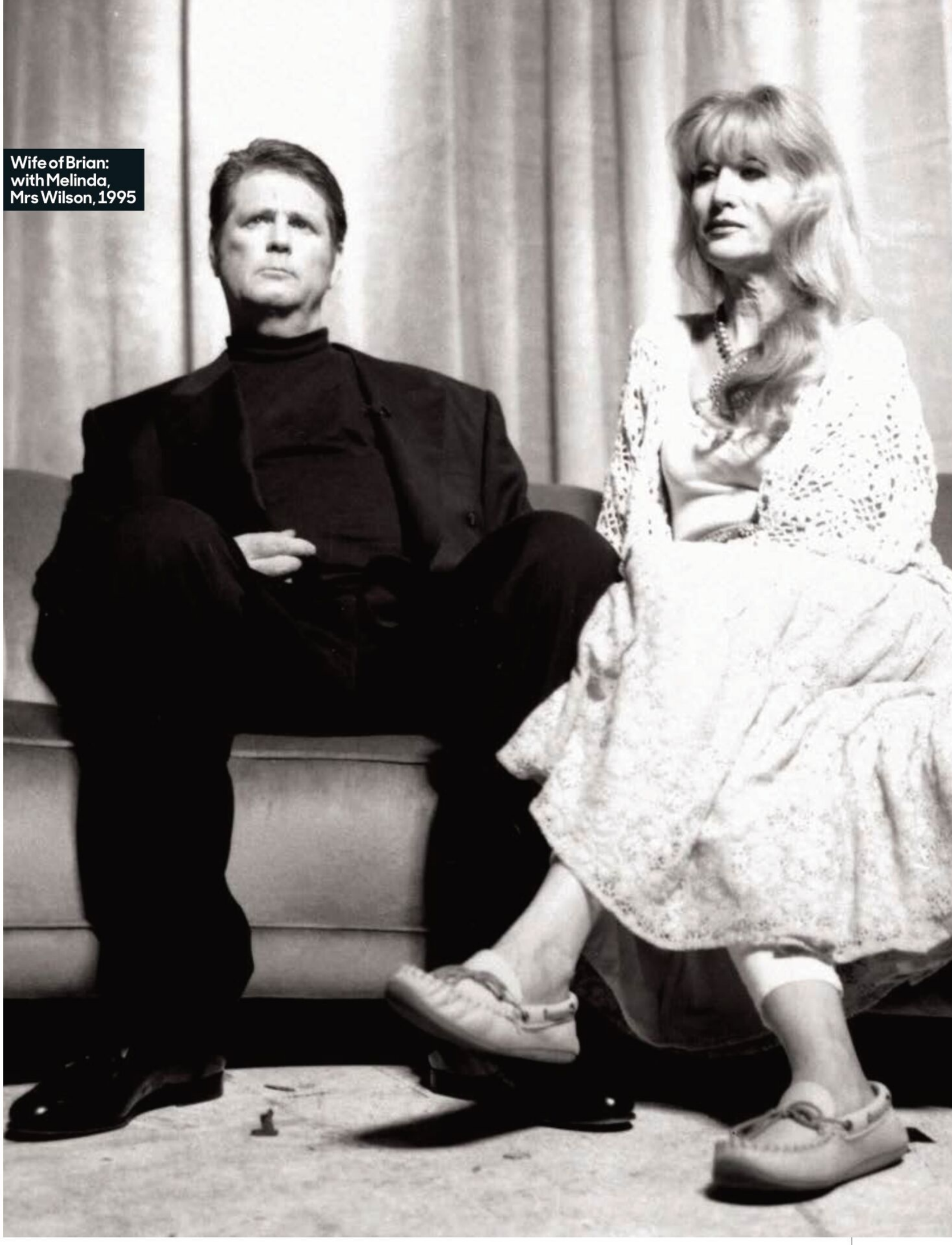
Periodically, throughout the '70s, a Brian Wilson comeback campaign would be launched, only to be stymied by increasingly duff albums and his horribly erratic mental state. One psychologist – a former music business hustler called Dr Eugene Landy – made some impression in the middle of the decade, but was dismissed by the band and Brian's then-wife Marilyn for outrageous salary demands and for dictating every single detail of his patient's life.

So The Beach Boys turned into a cabaret act. Mike Love, hooked on Transcendental Meditation, took cynical control of the band. Dennis, wasted, later died in a diving accident and Brian's state deteriorated until, in 1983, Landy was called back on to the job. For the best part of a decade, he cleaned Brian off street drugs, slimmed him down and helped him to record two solo albums (one, eponymously titled, was released in 1988; the second, *Sweet Insanity*, was shelved by the label two years later). He also completely took over Brian's life.

Shortly before work began on that first album, Sire Records boss Seymour Stein appointed an experienced Boston producer and musician, Andy Paley, to look after the project. Paley – an obsessive Beach Boys fan, one-time Patti Smith Group member, Madonna sideman and Boys Wonder/Plastic Bertrand producer – immediately befriended Wilson, but discovered that Landy's influence had strayed way out of the treatment room and into the studio.

"I think they probably saved his life," says Paley, "but just because you're able to get someone off drugs or save someone's life doesn't make you a songwriter or a record producer."

The solo album – overproduced, but still Brian's best effort by far since the early '70s – was released and acclaimed. Brian appeared healthier, but rumours persisted that Landy's manipulation of him was increasing, suggesting he bullied him into writing songs at ridiculous speed and then pronounced the resulting doggerel to be genius. Paley had little to do with *Sweet Insanity* – an album that reportedly



Wife of Brian: with Melinda, Mrs Wilson, 1995

EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

contains duets with Paula Abdul and Bob Dylan, and features Brian rapping – and is clearly not heartbroken that Sire refused to release it.

"The state of California held a conservancy trial," explains Paley, "which is when they appoint a conservator to someone who needs help managing their own affairs. This is what happens when someone is perceived by good friends of the person in question as an evil, or bad, influence. Relatives can get together – in this case it was Carl and Brian's daughters and Brian's mother – and say: 'This guy's gotta go.' They had a conservancy hearing and trial and a new conservator was appointed and this guy was told to get lost.

"Things immediately took a turn for the better. Brian started having a life of his own. He wasn't allowed to have girlfriends before that – I mean, it was really rough. All those people were moved out of Brian's life by the State Of California. By law.

"And the day, the very day, these people moved out of Brian's house, Brian called me and he said: 'Now I can do whatever I want. Come on over, let's write songs, let's have some fun.' He was so happy to be free."

IT WAS AROUND this time – late 1992 – that Van Dyke Parks reappeared on the scene, pursuing an erratic, idiosyncratic solo career with vague plans to make an album about the "quintessentially Californian experience", and with the idea to have Brian Wilson singing on it, especially on one song – "Orange Crate Art".

"I had waited 30 years and I thought that was an appropriate, a polite, amount of time," he says, wryly. "I took it out to him one night in torrential rain, frightened to death to play it to him, because of his reputation for high standards in music. He's got two assistants in the room with him [*men employed by the State Of California after Landy had been dismissed*] watching my every move, because they thought that I might give Brian some smack, uppers or downers or something, I guess. As far as I was concerned, the walls were melting, I was so petrified."

Brian, though, liked the song and agreed to sing on it. They went into the studio, with Parks gradually introducing more new songs, writing and producing everything and using Brian's multi-tracked voice as backgrounds, claiming he would add his own voice, as the lead, later.

"I continued to record the back-up voices, and then one day Brian said: 'Whose record is this?' I said: 'Well, it's our record, Brian.' We're maybe four tunes in and he's starting to get that sinking sensation that I'm tricking him into doing work. Every time we started a new song, he kept insisting that I start singing. I told him: 'Quite frankly, Brian, I can't stand the sound of my own voice and I'd like to be able to listen to this.' He said: 'I don't blame you.' I was conning Brian Wilson into doing this, no two ways about it, I was conning him."

Brian, of course, ended up singing everything. The resulting album, *Orange Crate Art* (due for release in early November), is a curiosity; ostensibly a mellow, crafted Parks record, with celestial Brian Wilson vocals. A little cheesy in places – it's much closer in spirit to composers like George Gershwin than to anything so vulgar as rock'n'roll – it still makes for a fine showcase for that startling, soaring voice. Now that the project's completed, plans are afoot for the two of them to record an album of standards next year.

THE MOST EXCITING music Brian Wilson has made in the past two years, however, is neither *Orange Crate Art* nor the Don Was-masterminded documentary soundtrack *I Just Wasn't Made For These Times*. In Andy Paley's tiny, airless office at Elektra Records in Beverly Hills, the lights switched off, a tape is playing that would stun any Beach Boys fan: dozens of songs, recorded with Paley, that are quite simply the most consistent and inspiring music Brian has made for at least 25 years. For any elder statesman of rock, they would be shockingly good. For a man allegedly a gibbering wreck, they're nothing short of revelatory.

Paley, who worked in the mid-'70s with Phil Spector, has helped rebuild the surging, intricate wall of sound that characterised the greatest Beach Boys records. No synthesisers have been used on these practically completed recordings, funded by Wilson himself. Paley nods and sings along proudly, claiming every period of The Beach Boys' career is reflected in the music: raw, "Surfin' USA"-style rockers like "I'm Broke" and "Desert Drive"; anguished, glimmering ballads like "It's Not Easy Being Me"; the authentically staggering "Getting In Over My Head"; *Smile*-like sound-pictures such as "Saturday Morning In The City"; and driving, awesomely inventive cascades of beautiful sound like "Chain Reaction Of Love".

There's one song on the tape, though, that throws up a completely different set of possibilities. In February, Wilson and Paley were coerced into recording – with The Beach Boys – one piece, "Dancin' The Night Away", for a new TV series, *Baywatch Nights*. Camera crews were present for the reunion. Brian and Mike Love posed happily together. But only the vocals for the bridge were completed – Carl Wilson singing lead in his still-perfect falsetto – before the session broke up acrimoniously.

"I think Brian's gotta make up his mind if he wants to make a Beach Boys record or a Brian Wilson record," explains Paley, clearly and understandably frustrated, "'cos he changes his mind about that all the time. Half the time he's into it, half the time he's not. You never know what he's gonna say about it..."

"But I'll tell you, really I don't think that's gonna happen, because Brian and I had a meeting with Mike Love and he listened to everything and Brian really stuck up for these songs and told him he didn't want them changed in any way. I know he's so anxious for this music to come out, and I know I am, too."

"Y'KNOW, YOU'LL have to take these birds out of here before we do this interview, 'cos they're gonna be chirping..."

Brian Wilson is preparing his kitchen for an interview. Present are his doting new wife Melinda Ledbetter; a maid, who is fixing him a big glass of Diet Coke; his amiable new manager David Leaf, a TV producer and Beach Boys biographer; and a couple of tropical birds. It's a relatively unshowy house by LA standards, sat high up in Laurel Canyon on a security-guarded estate. Business files litter the big kitchen table and, nearby, a china dog observes the scene from a shelf. From where I sit, it appears to be wearing a plastic fireman's helmet.

Heavy and greying, Wilson hardly looks like a rock star – but he doesn't look much like the wasted and ravaged monster of legend, either. Andy Paley claimed: "He's the best comedian I know," and it's immediately apparent that he's not averse to taking the piss out of himself and public perceptions of himself – hence the terrifying gurning he turns on for the *Vox* photographer's camera. The trouble is, as his moods swing wildly from sentence to sentence, it's hard to tell when he's joking and when he isn't.

Often, he has that innocent worldview, awkwardness and arcane language of a pampered Californian kid of the early '60s. Other times, he'll gaze off sadly into the distance and then erupt with rage, and all the demons that have plagued his adult life become suddenly and disturbingly apparent. Then, it's clear Brian Wilson will never be totally free of the mental horrors he's gone through. Like he says, it's a weird trip...

The first thing Brian says to me is: "*You* talk."

No, you talk, that's fine.

"No, I think we have a good start with everything."

**"EVERY TIME WE STARTED A NEW SONG, BRIAN KEPT INSISTING THAT I START SINGING"**
VAN DYKE PARKS

**OK. Some tracks I heard, like "Getting In Over My Head", sounds like one of the most soulful records you've ever made; kind of bluesy, raw and passionate. Were you trying to achieve that?**

"No... well, yeah, we wanted to achieve... First of all we need to do the one thing in life that we should do, and that is to bring spiritual love to people. Which we did in the '60s, and over the years, and I feel another cycle coming on to maybe have what I call a carte blanche from God to record. I don't think I thoroughly understand what that really means."

He laughs gently.

**What do you think it means?**

"Well, one way would be to say green lights, but that's kinda scary, y'know, so I guess you could say, just another chance to express ourselves

"I was totally at the mercy of my producer": Brian Wilson with Don Was

LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES)

and do something that people would like, that we could bring spiritual security to people. And people like Phil Spector, who made music that was an inspiration to The Beach Boys to messenger images – I mean, *er*, to messenger the messages, to deliver the messages for people, how small it ever might be or how insignificant it might be, at least we do know that we're doing some good, y'know? But not really a lot, though."

**David Leaf mentioned that your emotional security in the past year or two has been a contributory factor to becoming so productive again.**
"Yeah, yeah, that's very true. And I'm having a real time trying to put the pieces back together from this breakdown I had a while ago. But I'm getting there."

**When did you have the breakdown?**
"Well," he sighs deeply, "I had the breakdown like, I dunno, a couple of years ago, I guess. And then, like, I thought, 'As long as I'm having a nervous breakdown, it might as well be a good nervous breakdown.'"

**The whole machinery surrounding you now – Melinda, David, Andy – seems very secure.**
"It's like a shell to me. It curves like this" – he reaches out expansively – "like I'm back here in this shell and they're screening out some of the bad shit and keeping some of the cool shit cool, y'know? And it's kinda scary, but it's like playing football. When you first learn how to play football it's kinda scary, to get hit real hard by a tackler, y'know? But then, later on, you get mad and you start slamming around because there's no other way to do it.

"When I was playing football in high school I got hit so hard that I quit the team, y'know? Three guys hit me and knocked me on the ground so hard that I lost consciousness for 20 to 30 seconds. I got up, I said: 'I quit.' Never came back. I got knocked a little bit too hard, no way I could hang in there and play that rough. I was so scared of getting beat up, I quit."

**Did the experience make you a bit more nervous?**
"Yeah, it shook me up enough to make me nervous but, y'know," he sighs again, "... I like to play cool, y'know? That's what I wanted to do, was to try to get some cools going. But now I get teased back from a lot of people: 'Do I wanna get rough?' or 'Do I wanna get heavy?' And I say: 'Well, yeah, I think I can, probably.'

"But I never know from day to day what the fuck is really up, that's the only problem with me. I know The Beach Boys are good, I know I can make music, but the rest of the trip I don't know about.

"It's confusing, it's very confusing. The shell around me has given me a strength inside not to blast open, but to pry open something good and new, something positive. And I think that's what I could do."

**"I THOUGHT: AS LONG AS I'M HAVING A BREAKDOWN, IT MIGHT AS WELL BE A GOOD BREAKDOWN"**
BRIAN WILSON

**Tell me about the songs on *I Just Wasn't Made For These Times*.**
"They were all done in three days, the whole album. I walked in there and Don Was says" – he clicks his fingers authoritatively – "'Let's do this song.' I knew all the songs anyway, but I couldn't remember the lyrics, right, so he put the lyrics in front of me and blew them up real big, 'cos I can't see without my glasses. These giant words like: *'GET TOGETHER AND DO IT AGAIN!'* It was really great, standing there, singing. I didn't know what was going on."

**So you had no creative input?**
"Right. I was totally at the mercy of my producer."

**What about the Van Dyke Parks record?**
"Erm, same thing to him. It's like being at the mercy of somebody that great."

**But Van Dyke gave the impression that he was quite scared of working with you.**
"Oh, I don't think so," he sneers. "I think he's jiving you. Don't believe that for a second. I think he's telling you a big hype. I know Van Dyke better than that and I think he's lying to you. He's looking at you and telling you a dirty lie."

**He claimed he tricked you into singing lead.**

"Yeah, he tricked me all right. He sure did, and I listened and saw why he wanted me to do it, 'cos they're good: good leads. And he's going: 'You're the best singer in the whole world.'"

**Did it represent a healing of the trauma between the two of you over *Smile*?** "Sure. It sure was."

**Is the ghost laid to rest?**
"Not completely, no. But I wish. I'd have hoped for something a little better. I think we can do better."

**'Desert Drive' is great.**
"Oh, 'Desert Drive'. Don't tell me about that." He appears stunned.

**Why?**
"Heavy duty, man. I mean, honest to God, it's enough to jump up. The only time I ever really jumped out of my chair in 30 years was when I heard Andy's stuff, where Andy was at with his music. It got me off my chair, clapping my hands, moving around, writing songs, y'know? It took 30 years – since Phil Spector's records – to get that inspiration. So when it comes along you recognise it, you don't fuck with it, 'cos it's the real thing. I don't want to go [*he puts on a whiny voice*]: 'Oh, I'm too scared to work with Andy Paley, but I still think he's great.' That's bullshit, too. Being scared of somebody is bullshit, of course."

**So you're not scared of anyone?**
"Erm..." He bangs his glass down hard on the table. "I divide it into two things: Big Brian is not scared of anybody and Little Brian is scared of everybody. So that's my problem."

**So there are still people out there...**
"...that I can't deal with. Absolutely, in any way at all."

**Anyone we can talk about?**
"Yeah, you," he abruptly switches from seriousness to silliness. "You are the man of the hour, you're the interviewer."

**Van Dyke says he wants to do an album of cover versions with you.**
"Nah, he's lying to you. Oh no... standards, you mean? Oh yeah. Well, we're not gonna do that 'til next year, maybe October or November. But I'm gonna go crazy, I'm slowly losing my fucking mind over these new projects. But what the fuck – it's what you should do."

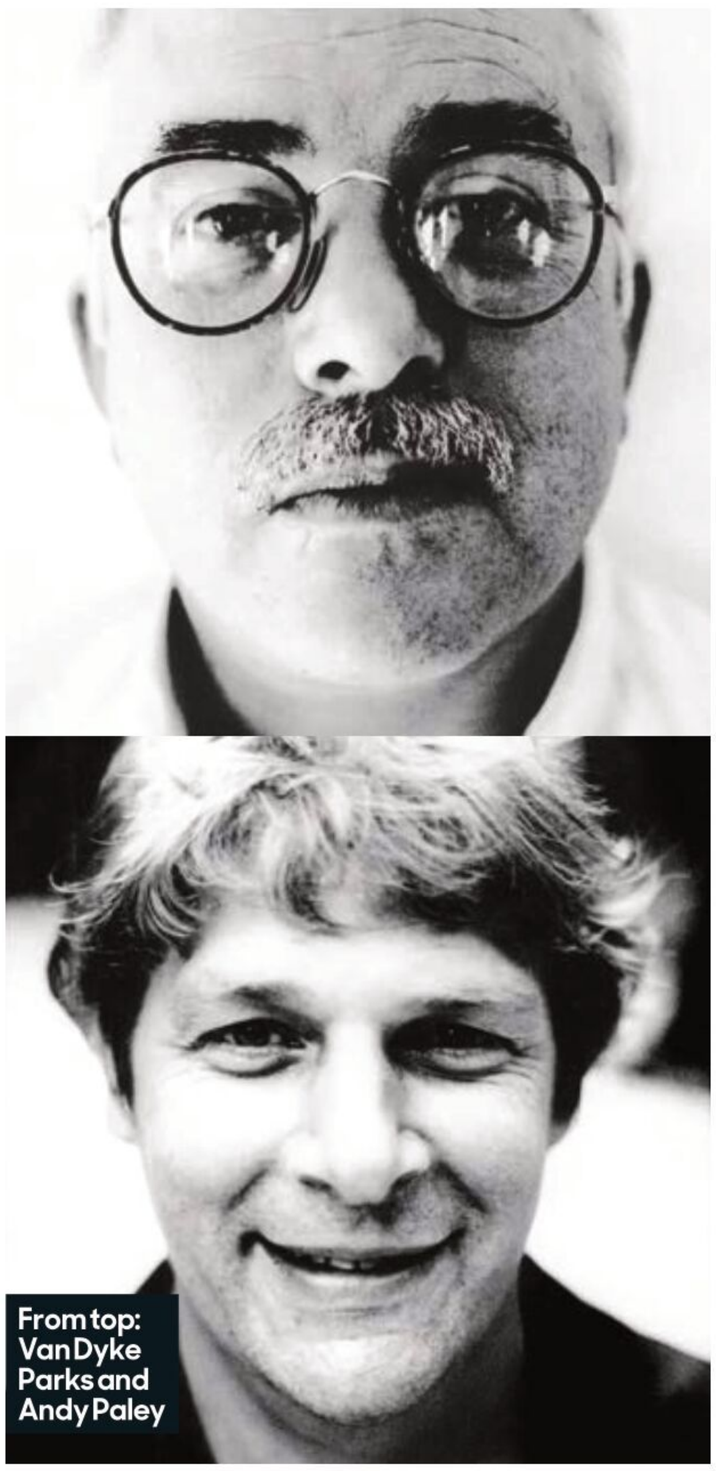
**You seem to have so many things on the boil at the moment.**
"Yeah, I've got a few things going on, but my brain is totally bombarded, y'know? Calls from people, thoughts of people, voices in my head. I've gotten into a spin here a little bit, y'know?"

**You're feeling pretty stressed out by it all?**
"Yeah."

**It's weird: nothing for seven years, then two albums in two months...**
"And, of course, my solo career isn't doing too well until we find out what the fuck's going on with the sales. I'd be glad if we sold 20 records," he jokes, distancing himself from real concern. "I don't care. Twenty-five records! Wow! Your album's sold 25 records."

**I think you're doing a bit better than that.**
"Thing is, would you buy a record if you liked it? Do you buy records when you hear them on the radio? Do you actually go to a store and buy a record? You do? We do the same thing, my wife and I, we buy Willie Nelson records."

**What've you listened to recently?**
"Willie Nelson. He's our Featured Artist."



From top: Van Dyke Parks and Andy Paley

**So you're into country now?**
"Oh yeah. Wow, that's another story there."

**Why?** "I dunno. It makes me laugh. Ha ha ha ha," he chuckles fakely. "Oh boy."

**Andy says you're undecided which material is for your solo career and which is for The Beach Boys?**
"Well, we've already gone through that shit with Melinda and David. The Beach Boys are out. The Beach Boys are being assholes to me. So I take the lesser of two evils; I'll work on my own, solo, before I work with a bunch of guys that don't give a shit about me."

**Why are they being assholes to you, Brian?**
"Why? Well, there's probably five or six real good reasons why they don't like me. One is they're jealous. Two: erm, they're assholes. Three: they're too businessmen and too businesslike. And four: there's no respect. They have no respect for me. They just spit at me and kick me, no respect at all. I say, 'Well, fuck it then!'" He's really wound up now.

**Even Carl's doing this to you?**
"Carl is my brother, but Carl is an asshole. I love Carl, I love his singing, but he's an asshole to me. Those guys are assholes. I oughta beat the hell out of them all. I dunno, I'd probably get beat up if I tried that."

**You reckon?**
"I'd get beat to hell. Mike would beat me. I couldn't handle that – he's very bulky, strong, he'd beat the hell out of me!"

**Al's quite small, you could have a go with him.**
"Al's cool, man. He's not too good a singer, but he's a pretty nice man."

**Did the latest Beach Boys "asshole" behaviour come about around the *Baywatch Nights* recording?**
"Yeah, we managed to get Carl on tape but we couldn't get Mike on tape. That wasn't the best chemistry or song for The Beach Boys that we were doing. We could try another one, there's always something else to try."

**But you don't really want to at the moment?**
"No. Assholes should be treated like assholes. That's how I feel about my group. I can't get nothing but detours and bad vibes, it makes me wanna split the state and go live in Miami or Hawaii and live a couple of years on my – our – money and not do anything. Y'know, it's a tragedy that people get that way. They'd rather destroy something than do something. I'm just waiting around, I'm as positive as I can possibly be."

**What are they trying to destroy exactly?**
"Well, I think The Beach Boys are trying to destroy me as a producer. I think they're trying to make Terry Melcher [*veteran producer who co-wrote The Beach Boys' Brian-less 1988 No 1, "Kokomo"*] their hero and me their villain. Fuck that shit, y'know? I'm not gonna go through that."

**It's incredibly sad when you think what you've done for them.**
"I think it's sad, yeah."

**You think Mike'd still be pumping gas if it wasn't for you?**
"Nooo. I ain't shit when it comes down to it, but I certainly don't think he is, either," he laughs. "I mean, a fight is a fight, y'know?"

**But you've had so many fights with him over the years and yet still you go into the studio with him?**
"You mean being in the same room with him? We can still do that, yeah. We still have that together, but we've gotta work on ourselves. How would you deal with it? If you went in

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the studio with The Beach Boys, and you were gonna produce them, how would you go about doing it?"

**I don't know... hold a gun to their heads, I think.**
"Really? Oh, so you'd force The Beach Boys like a gangster?"

**Well, from what I know about Mike, it seems that force is the only thing he understands.**
"He relates to that. That's a good idea, thank you," he laughs. "That's really cool. You mean put on the pressure?"

**Yeah. How many times has he done that to you over the years?**
"Probably once."

Melinda snorts. "Oh yeah, with a couple of zeroes behind it."

"He put me on an insecurity trip for about a hundred years by just not looking at me like he really cared that much for me."

"Brian lets his emotions get involved with his family and his work," interjects Melinda. She has left her seat and is now supportively stroking her husband's neck and shoulders tenderly as she talks. "With them, it's all work."

"I mean, I don't care," continues Brian, clearly meaning the opposite. "The only things I have to go on are feelings. If I feel that nobody likes me, or that the group is a big scam, it's gonna put me on a bummer, but the worse it gets to me, the worse it'll be for me later. Because you can't put a person through that much bullshit and not expect that person to turn up with some kind of ego-trip disaster that's gonna fucking scare people to death."

"I dunno. We're taking chances. If we try something heavy we stand a chance of getting knocked off because somebody else in a higher position would not want us to get anywhere. So that's my problem. I used to think gangsters ruled my life, but I don't think that any more."

**But emotional gangsters have, in the past, used nasty techniques to rule your life?**
"What it applies to me is," he taps out the rhythm of the words with his glass, "I'M-BEING-FORCED-TO-DO-SOMETHING-I-DON'T-WANNA-DO. I've had emotional gangsters run my life for 20 years. I pray to God with all my heart and soul that it doesn't happen again. I don't wanna go back to that place."

"It's like a double-edged sword," Melinda explains. "He loves the sound, but he doesn't want the problems."

"The bottom line is: all I have to go on is how I feel. And if I feel like I'm being rejected or The Beach Boys don't wanna work with me, or somebody else doesn't wanna work with me, I'll go elsewhere."

**They know which buttons to push.**

"Yeah, that's true. I dunno... Fuck the fucking Beach Boys. I mean, that is the truth, man. I'm sorry to have a negative on them. You probably want me to say: 'Hohoho, everything's great. Oh wow.'"

**How much money have they taken off...**
"Oh hell... Mike clobbered me. He got five big million dollars from me [*for 'uncredited lyrics' that Love successfully claimed he had written to some of the group's biggest hits*]. That's a lot of money. I didn't care. I said: 'You deserve it, you didn't get anywhere with "California Girls" so, fine, here's your money.' That's cool, no problem," he adds sarcastically.

"I don't miss it. I was real rich one time – I had five million bucks in the bank last year, and I lost it."

**Yet you still go on TV with Mike, he goes to your wedding, Carl's your best man – how'd you put up with that? How'd you let them back into your life?**
"I dunno. It hurts me a little bit, but I don't mind Carl being around."

Melinda comes to his rescue again. "Brian thinks blood is thicker than water, regardless of what goes on with these guys. In some respects, they're still family, and he's probably more forgiving than you or I would be."

"Hey, love is the answer in a lot of cases," he says determinedly.

Brian's off on another tangent now.

"Our friend Andy [*Paley*] is a mental genius but he's a little crippled, y'know? His hell is, of

**"I'VE HAD EMOTIONAL GANGSTERS RUN MY LIFE FOR 20 YEARS. I PRAY IT DOESN'T HAPPEN AGAIN"**
BRIAN WILSON

"Life is a big scare test for me": Wilson at home in August 1995

BOB RIHA JR./GETTY IMAGES

course, that he feels shitty about working with me. I can tell, when he talks to me, that he'd rather work with Phil Spector or something."

"Brian!" shouts Melinda, exasperated.

"OK, I'm being negative, all right, maybe, but that's how I feel." He bangs on the table emphatically.

"The bottom line is: no booze parties, no big huh-huh-huh. The real trip is that we're gonna go forward with a solo career and we're not gonna let anybody like The Beach Boys slow us down or fuck us up. The Boys are big businessmen, and people are a little scared of 'em, but at the same time there are people in the industry who can kick The Beach Boys right out of the world."

Men over board: (*l–r*) Al Jardine, Carl Wilson, Bruce Johnston, Brian Wilson and Mike Love, LA, 1995

**But all The Beach Boys do is cynically cash in on your reputation.**

"But the Boys themselves didn't even know what the fuck they were doing. They didn't realise that they were being messengers for higher people."

Melinda: "That's how he looks upon them: as the messengers of his music."

"And they were so scared that they literally kicked some butt. And nobody can sing better than Mike Love – he's the best singer in the whole industry, except for Danny [*Hutton, an old friend of Brian's and former leader of Three Dog Night*]."

**What about Carl?**

"Nah. Carl can't sing for shit. The best he can do onstage is go: 'HO!' and yell. "The truth is, there's no getting out of bad vibes, no getting out of people that don't like you."

"The problem is, the reality is, he does care," continues Melinda, honestly, "but it's a constant struggle. All he's ever wanted is for them to be nice to him. It's so hard for him to have any type of conflict in his life. He just hates conflict. He wants everything to be OK all the time."

**Do you remember a time when you were as happy and contented as now?**

"Well, er... no. Actually, no. Well this interview of course is a big breakthrough," he laughs again. "I had a dream the other night and I kept dreaming that I said to myself: 'I wanna break on through to the other side!' Didn't some group do a song like that? Morrison, right? Morrison from The Doors. I'm trying to write a song about that."

**And what's on the other side?**

"Ohhh..." – he starts singing again – "'*Milk and honey on the other side, Hallelujah!*' The last coupla days, my brain just hasn't been functioning right. I have auditory hallucinations in my head."

Melinda elucidates: "Basically, Brian has problems with depression. Day to day it varies, and auditory hallucinations are caused because the neuro-transmitters in the brain have gone haywire. So we're on new medication, we've alleviated a lot of the old medication. So some days he has great days, and other days are..."

"...Lousy," he mumbles.

"...Lousy. And the problem is that stress is a major cause of auditory hallucinations through depression. It's an ongoing thing that Brian's always gonna be dealing with, but for the first time in his life he's with people that understand what he's going through instead of saying: 'You're crazy.' And what we know about the brain is... nothing."

Brian burps loudly. "I'm not sure about the brain, but I don't understand what goes on between brain and emotion when you write a song. Are you writing a song from your soul or from your brain? It's weird. What goes on?"

"The amazing part," wonders his wife, "is many creative people suffer from depression. Maybe that's the part of the brain that deals with creativity, too."

**So would you have sacrificed the creativity to have avoided the depression?**

"Yeah. It gets back to being scared, because if you're depressed, that's gonna fuck your mind up. Being depressed these days, that throws your mind into a scared situation."

**But for an entire life of complete emotional and psychological simplicity, would you have sacrificed every note of music that you've written and played?**

He becomes vague and makes desperate attempts to change the subject. Melinda firmly takes over the questioning. "No, Brian. If, in fact, you could have a life free of depression and auditory hallucinations, free of all the emotional insecurity that you've gone through, would you trade that with having your life with music?"

He answers very quietly. "No."

"No, I don't think so," she says, satisfied.

"As much emotional security as I have, I still need more though," he returns.

**But music's so important to you that you're prepared to go through the rough times?**

He's very distant, suddenly exhausted. "Yeah. Oh yeah."

AFTERWARDS, sitting outside Brian Wilson's house, staring out over the valley, David Leaf says that Brian changes his opinions all the time, that what we just heard was only representative of what he thought and felt today, this lunchtime. "Later," he says, "he might sit down and write a song specifically for The Beach Boys."

Plainly, his indecisiveness is actually a tremendous volatility. And seeing someone still so patently talented being torn apart by what is, ultimately, fairly trivial shit, is awfully sad.

But then again, he is an ill man who appears, for once, to be being properly looked after. As Melinda said: "Basically, we call a spade a spade now; it's Brian suffering from depression. Before, people tried to hide it. You don't have to be afraid to tell somebody that you're hearing a voice in your head."

The old stories about Brian Wilson finding incredible solace in his music are all true, and the things he says shows that he has at least some perspective and a tenacious grip on reality; his own situation is far stronger than many people are prepared to give him credit for.

"If I'm scared, I'm gonna be good scared," he says. "I don't wanna be fucking scared. Not this bullshit about I can't do it, I can't walk out my door, I'm afraid of The Rolling Stones, I'm afraid of Phil Spector. That's bullshit. Life is a big scare test for me.

"You wanna hear the tip of all tips? To hear it is to handle it. I figured that out. I was going through a lot of hell, a lot of confusion, a lot of sorrow, right? And I was hearing things, I'd hear a record on the radio or I heard someone talking and I said to myself: 'To hear it is to handle it.' I finally got that, 'cos before I could hear it and I couldn't handle it. So if I can handle what I hear, hey! Fuck you, I'm gonna be cool – that's all there is to it. It's a heavy-duty thing but, believe me, it doesn't take much, man.

"It just takes a slight, little voice, a slight, little idea to make my whole fucking day... that's all."

LESTER COHEN/WIREIMAGE

THE BEACH BOYS FILMS

RELEASED: 1965–2022

# THE BEACH BOYS ON SCREEN

**Reverential docs. TV movies. Flawed dramatisations. How best to capture the Beach Boys story on the screen. And whose story is it anyway?** BY STEPHEN TROUSSÉ

MIDWAY through the second part of *The Beach Boys: American Family*, originally screened on ABC in February 2000, we find "Samuel Pierce" (hastily renamed when Van Dyke Parks threatened to sue) explaining to the long-suffering Capitol Records A&R chief Nick Venet exactly what he plans to contribute to the record Brian Wilson is attempting to compose, piece by piece, through the endless summer of 1966. "You see, The Beach Boys have this pan-patriotic kind of trans-presidential vibe," he says, peering owlishly through his spectacles. "They're Americana personified, and that gives us a platform to bring a kinda Mark Twain irony thing into rock'n'roll."

The group's vexed status as "Americana personified" ("They are America's band" as President Ronald Wilson Reagan put it in 1983, hoping to catch a few of those Californian rays) goes some way to explaining the persistent attempts to bring The Beach Boys to the screen. At various times over the past five decades you might find the Wilsons – contending for the title of the nation's First Family with the Waltons, the Kennedys, the Jacksons, the Bushes, the Cosbys, the Simpsons, the Kardashians, the Carters – as the supreme incarnation of American innocence, American dysfunction, American tragedy, American genius or American redemption.

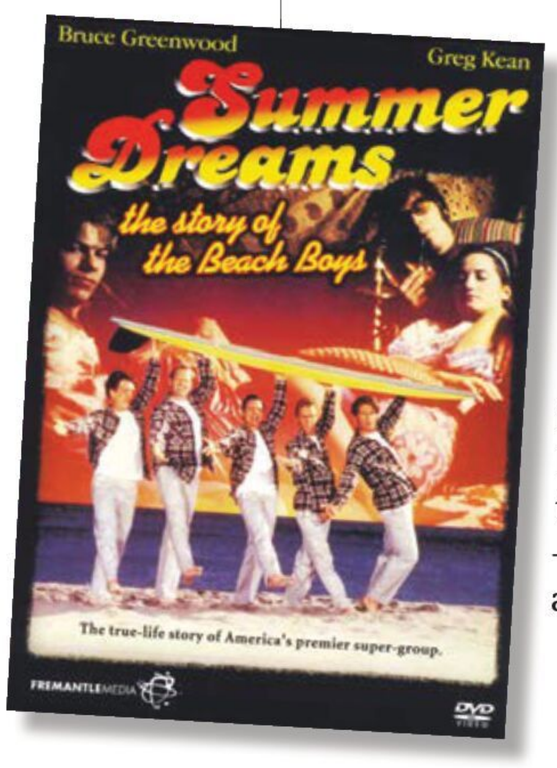
And maybe the absence of much in the way of that "Mark Twain irony thing" hints at why the films so rarely, so fleetingly capture much of the band's musical or mythic resonance. It's quite possible that it would take some unholy combination of PT and Wes Anderson, David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino to bring the full scope – all the wonder, glee, uncanny beauty, trauma and horror – of this particular American saga to the screen.

As their mercifully brief appearance, singing "Little Honda", in the 1965 surfsploitation straggler ***The Girls On The Beach*** (WILLIAM WITNEY, 1965 ★) confirms, Dennis aside, the boys tended to be as wooden as a Malibu funboard on camera (arguably The Monkees had to be invented precisely to fill the media vacuum this created).

But ever since George Lucas laid "All Summer Long" thickly over the end credits of *American Graffiti* in 1973, and really tapped into their mythic potential for the first time, they've rarely been off our screens, in TV specials, documentaries and biopics – as though there's still some Rosebud mystery to be uncovered among the Xanadu of the music.

***Summer Dreams*** (MICHAEL SWITZER, 1990 ★★) was the first attempt to dramatise the band's story and was appropriately deranged. Based loosely on Steven Gaines' 1986 book *Heroes and Villains* (part of a deluge of 1980s rock biographies that aimed to anatomise the 1960s through precise detailing of the moral and chemical squalor), it decided that the real central character in the Beach Boys story was Dennis.

It's not such a bad idea. Even if he only got into the band as a sop to Ma Wilson and barely played on the records, Dennis was the golden embodiment of mythic California – the only Wilson boy to surf, to sleep around, the one who stole T-Birds and




## Critics' Verdict

**"Whereas many musical biopics have strived for accessibility by focusing on personal dramas rather than creative matters, *Love & Mercy* puts the songs at the centre of Wilson's story."**

JASON ANDERSON, UNCUT, NOVEMBER 2014

**"*Long Promised Road* pitches itself as a kind of sequel to *Love & Mercy*, hoping to understand how, with the love of a good woman, Brian bounced back to finish *Smile*, reform The Beach Boys and enjoy an extended victory lap."**

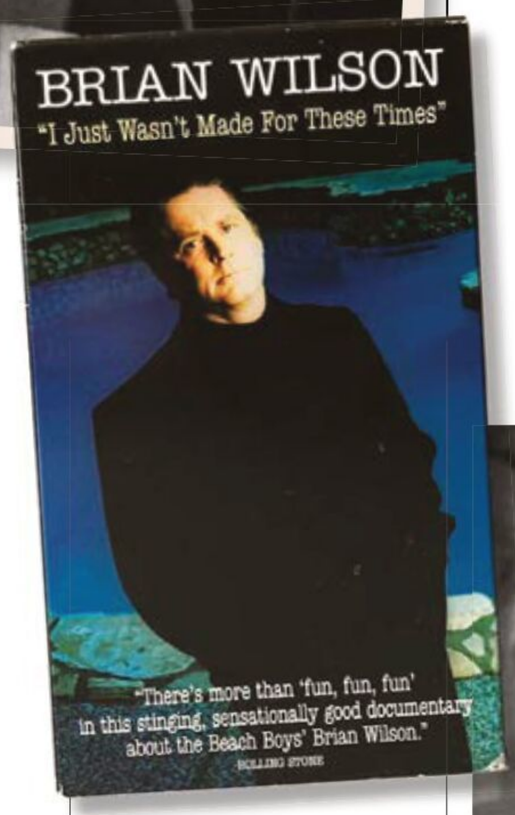
STEPHEN TROUSSÉ, UNCUT, MARCH 2022

The Beach Boys make an appearance in 1965 surfsploitation movie *The Girls On The Beach*

(From left) Noreen Corcoran, Gail Gilmore, Lana Wood, Linda Marshall in *The Girls On The Beach*

cruised the freeways. What's more, thanks to posthumous veneration of his 1977 solo album *Pacific Ocean Blue*, he's arguably emerged as the hipster's favourite Beach Boy, now that Brian's own mainstream canonisation is complete. And so many of the best fictional reckonings with pop – from *The Hours And Times*, the 1991 film about John Lennon and Brian Epstein's 1963 Barcelona holiday, to Kevin Barry's 2015 novel *Beatlebone* – take a winningly oblique angle on over-familiar myths.

But *Summer Dreams* is purest TV movie trash – and possibly more entertaining than some of the more earnest attempts to follow. Bruce Greenwood labours manfully through a series of increasingly implausible haircuts, does his best to bring some soul to the hacky script ("Why not write a song about surfing Brian? I'd be totally stoked!"), but even he can't escape the bathos of the slo-mo wobbly handicam of Dennis's final descent into the harbour at Marina Del Rey.



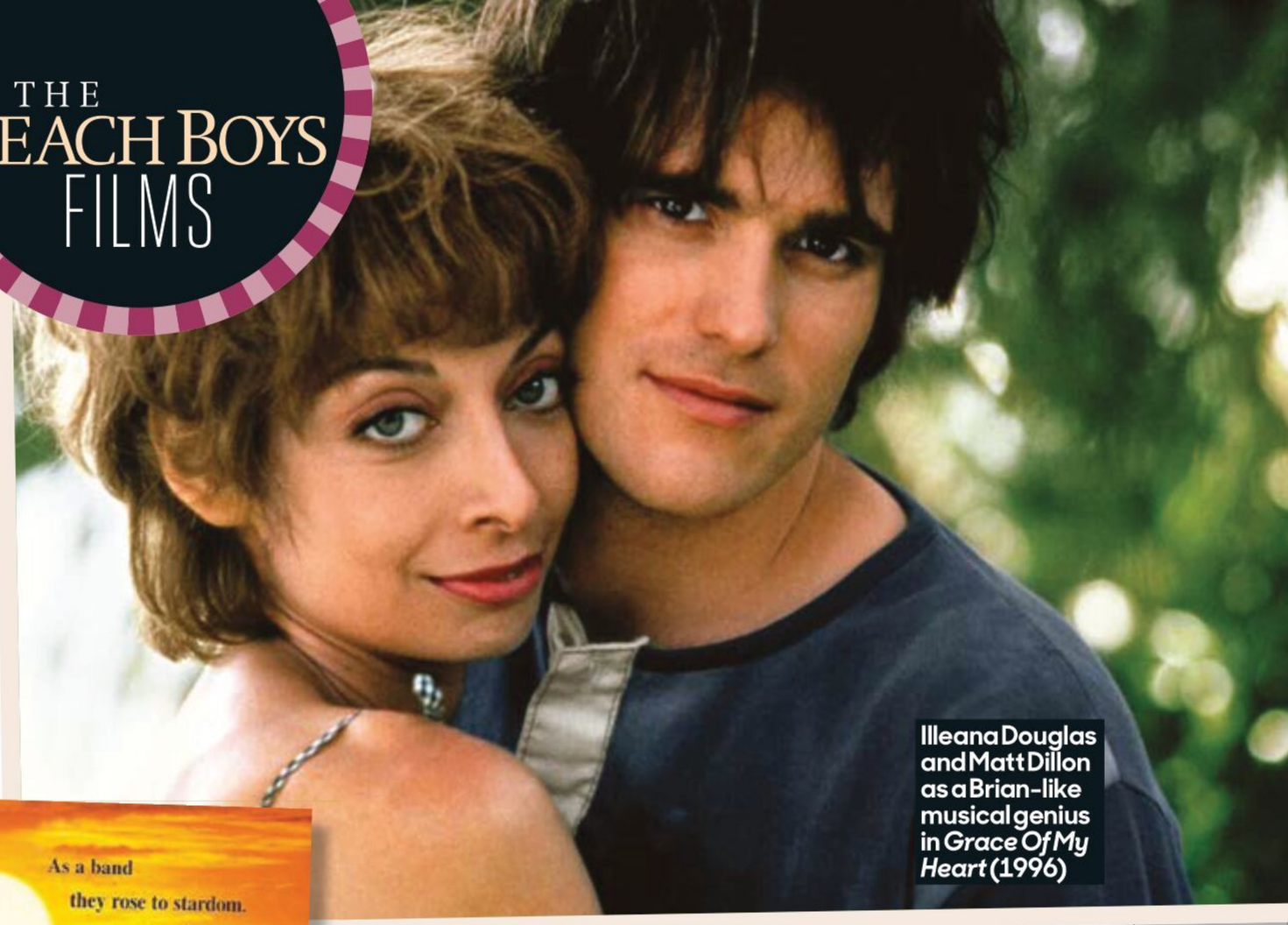

The film is chiefly concerned with the lurid Wilson family psychodrama, and in Arlen Dean Snyder's portrayal, it creates the most monstrous Murry Wilson of all – a drunken, violent and vengeful father, hounding his sons into madness and early death.

The music is barely an afterthought – Brian a tubby guy eating ice-cream and having panic attacks in the background, thoughtfully composing "God Only Knows" to soundtrack Dennis's first divorce. In fact, presumably for rights reasons, *Pet Sounds* and *Smile* don't feature at all, with the mid-'60s depicted purely through comedy wigs and fat suits.

*Summer Dreams* is precisely what Don Was aimed to address in his labour of love, ***I Just Wasn't Made For These Times*** (**DON WAS, 1995**, ★★★★). Shot like a European arthouse movie in earnest black and white, and featuring a string of musicologists, Randy Newman, Linda Ronstadt, John Cale, Thurston Moore and Van Dyke Parks, it made a stirring case for Wilson as the greatest lost American pop auteur. It also gave us a

Brian Wilson and his mother Audree in *I Just Wasn't Made For These Times* (1995)

EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Illeana Douglas and Matt Dillon as a Brian-like musical genius in *Grace Of My Heart* (1996)

hint of a happy ending for Brian, freed from the clutches of Eugene Landy, married to Melinda and reconciled with his daughters, who have just spent their first father's day with their dad.

The documentary was a powerful and necessary corrective to the glib showbiz exploitation of the Beach Boys brand, but as with all auteur theory it tended to glory in the great genius, glossing over the accident, collaboration and argument that are central to all pop careers. Mike Love may have been "the biggest asshole in pop history", but he was also the necessary grit in the Beach Boys oyster, as well as co-writer of the strongest single run in American pop history. You will struggle to find much mention of him here.

ALLISON ANDERS' curious ***Grace Of My Heart*** (ALLISON ANDERS, 1996, ★★★) follows Ileana Douglas's Carole King-like career from up-and-coming songwriter in the Brill Building, and out to California, where her first solo single is produced by surf wunderkid Jay Phillips, played by Matt Dillon. Here the thinly veiled Brian Wilson is an idiot-savant, capable of discerning the very music of the spheres, but unable to keep track of his wife's kids on a visit to the museum.

Again, you can glimpse the burgeoning Church of Brian in the background: the avant-pop theremin opus that Jay attempts to lead his Riptides through sounds remarkably like Mercury Rev tuning up for *Deserters Songs*, while J Mascis grins blearily in a cameo as itinerant studio hand, simply delighted to have somehow beamed back into the 1966 Gold Star Studio.

That church eventually gets its very own monument with ***Beautiful Dreamer*** (DAVID LEAF, 2004 ★★★), telling the story of *Smile's* genesis and eventual abandonment, as The Beach Boys returned from a triumphant tour of the UK and were horrified to find how thoroughly Brian had been "fucking with the formula" with Van Dyke Parks in their absence through the summer of 1966.

Leaf's learned, reverent documentary picks up the tale in the autumn of 2003, as Brian, fresh from performing *Pet Sounds* to adoring audiences, unexpectedly elects to continue working with Darian Sahanaja and VDP on material from the *Smile* sessions, and overcomes debilitating self-doubt to present *Brian Wilson Presents Smile* on stage at the Royal Festival Hall in 2004, finally vindicated and taking his bow, arm in arm with VDP.

***American Family*** (JEFF BLECKNER, 2000, ★★★) is a more dutiful dramatic attempt to tell the full Beach Boys story, one more time with feeling, as a kind of dynastic saga – the *Magnificent Ambersons* or *Royal Tenenbaums* of Hawthorne, California. The monster of Murry Wilson is contextualised and humanised as an almost Willie Loman figure, in scenes with his own overbearing parents and in-laws, and Dennis's escapades with the Mansons are framed, a little-too-on-the-nose, as a fatally misguided attempt to find a substitute Family. Even Mike's adventures in transcendental meditation are presented sympathetically, his own way to deal with his own burden of parental trauma.

And though the perspective of the film tends to side with Mike and Marilyn Wilson as Van Dyke and "the drainers" move in, leading Brian astray into acid, fireman helmets and symphonies to God, it does a pretty good job of following the band through *Pet Sounds* and *Smile*, even as there's a palpable relief when the band regroups in the early '70s: "Since Watergate there's a new generation looking for something simpler!".

But there's an absurd desperation to build to an all-American happy ending. Returning to Murry's house after his death, the Wilson boys are tearful to find the trove of Beach Boys memorabilia he carefully collected. "Your father was never an affectionate man," says Audree Wilson, the hot-so-secret hero of the whole saga, with a catch in her throat "but in his way he loved you more than anything." "You're right," agree the boys, having finally learned important life lessons. "Let's focus on the most important thing he gave us: the music". Abrupt cut to 1974, with *Endless Summer* going double platinum, the boys back on stage at Anaheim Stadium, the crowd going wild to "Fun Fun Fun", Dennis apparently clothed and lucid, and even Brian brought back on stage for brotherly hugs and kisses – while the sainted Audree looks on, hands clasped in prayer from the audience.

Of course despite their commercial rebirth, the 1970s offered no happy ending for any of the Beach Boys – particularly Brian, who in the bittersweet, bifurcated biopic ***Love & Mercy*** (BILL POHLAD, 2014 ★★★) is not shy about reminding us he spent at least three years of the decade in bed, and the rest eating, drinking smoking and consuming a pharmacopeia of drugs.

*Love & Mercy* is affecting almost despite itself. Switching from Paul Dano's Brian-past of the 1960s to John Cusack's Brian-future of the late 1980s, with no discernible resemblance between the actors could be a stroke of casting genius worthy of Buñuel or Lynch, but it just feels distracting. And that's before you even get to Cusack's performance itself, part-*Rain Man*, part *Forrest Gump*, with a weird hint of Donald Trump's prissy diction.

But the film's triumph is the depiction of Brian's uncanny auditory imagination. Following the paternal beating that left him practically deaf in one ear, the camera zooms into the very tympanic membrane of Brian's ear, and the sound design is alive to his vivid hallucinations – hearing his father's angry roar in his headphones, even when he isn't there – and acutely sensitive misophonia, unable to bear even the tinkling of cutlery. And Paul Dano gives the performance of his career as a young man finding an earthly paradise in the Gold Star Studios, conducting the Wrecking Crew like a munificent anti-Spector.

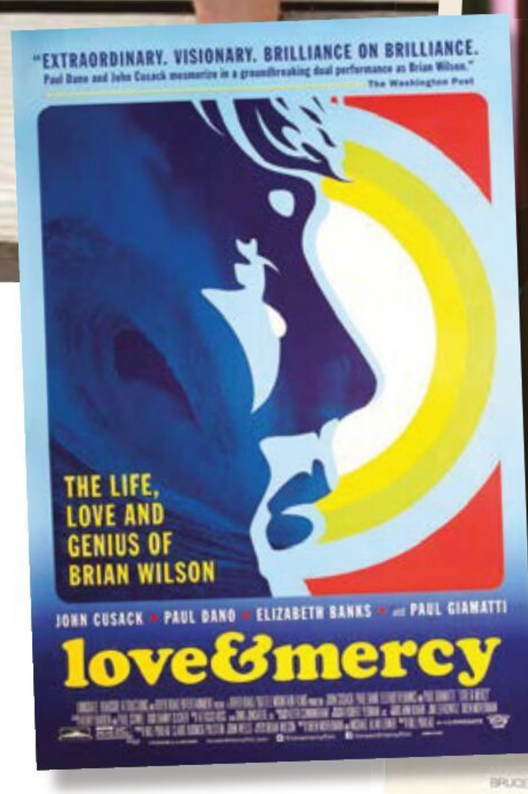
If it tends towards hagiography, it's one very much authored by Brian's second wife, Melinda Ledbetter, with Elizabeth Banks scarcely able to conceal a smirk in the role as the fairy-tale princess who secures his escape from the infernal Eugene Landy. Paul Giamatti has a ball in an unnerving wig and a macabre grin, playing Landy as the second coming of Murry Wilson – the monster somehow back from the grave to discipline and punish Brian with his regimen of healthfood and house arrest.

The happy ending is no less generic, but seemed more convincing this time – with Brian's return to the stage, the

PAUL GIAMATTI HAS A BALL PLAYING EUGENE LANDY AS THE SECOND COMING OF MURRY WILSON

TCD/PROD.DB / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Home Boy: Paul Dano as the young Brian in *Love & Mercy* (2014)



Brian Wilson, Paul Dano and Al Jardine perform at the Vibrato Jazz Club, LA, to mark the DVD release of *Love & Mercy*, October 12, 2015

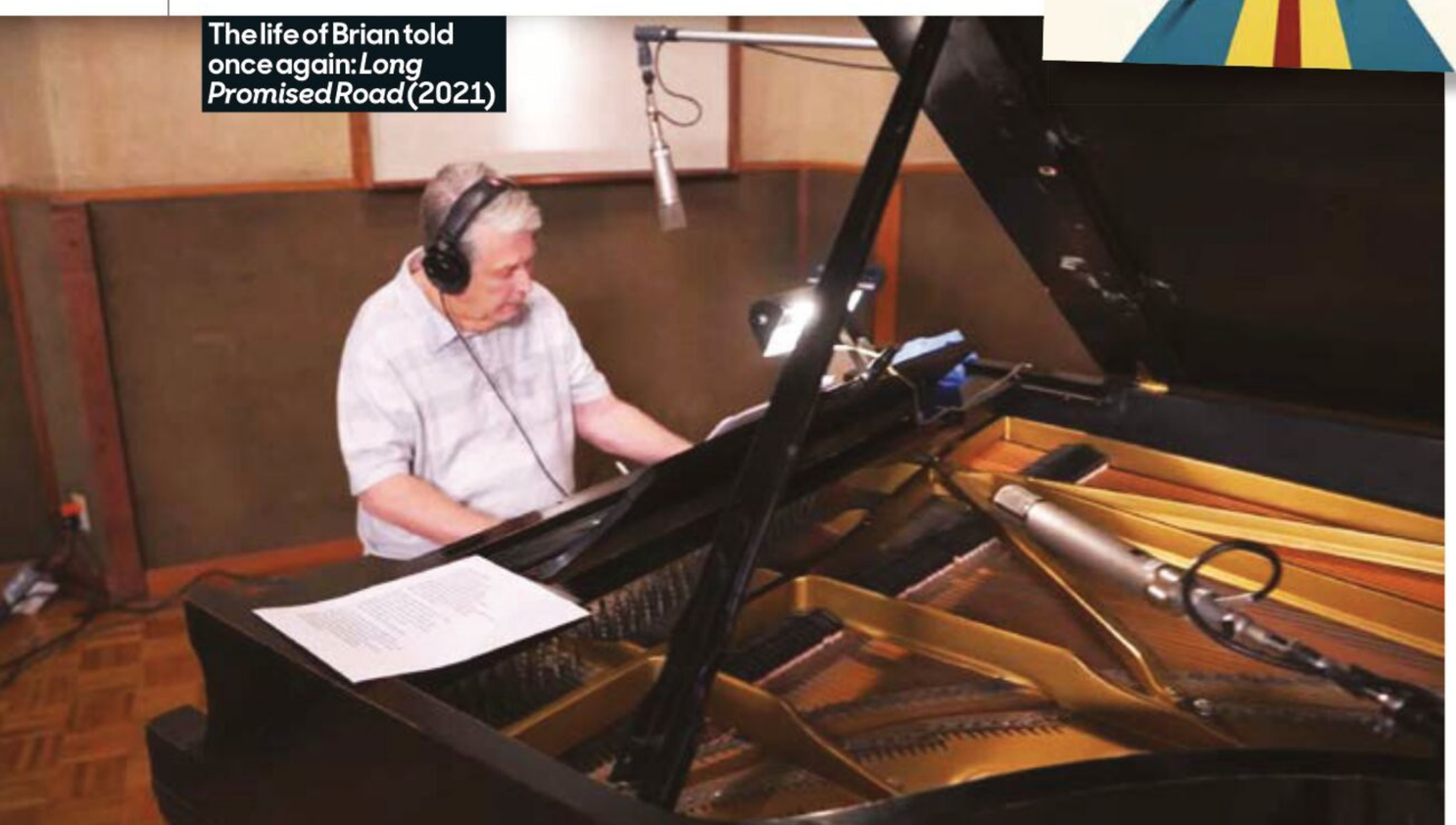
completion of *Smile*, The Beach Boys reunited, the universal acclaim and adoration, and a loving family home.

But even this resolution was queered by ***Long Promised Road*** (BRENT WILSON, 2022 ★★★). On the face of it the film is another made-for-TV life achievement reel, with the great (Springsteen) the good (Elton John) and Linda Perry enlisted to pay formulaic homage and tell the Life of Brian one more time. But Brian is unable to play ball. He's incredibly uncomfortable on camera, a long way from unlikely romantic lead who drives off into the sunset at the end of *Love & Mercy*.

This Brian seems to move through life on a precipice of panic and terror. Frustrated by the failure of the interview set-up, the director recruits *Rolling Stone* writer Jason Fine, something of a confidant because of his calming, supportive presence. The two cruise around California through a landscape Wilson has immortalised in song, from Hawthorne, through Paradise Cove and on to the Hollywood Bowl. It's *Carpool Karaoke* meets *Twin Peaks: The Return*.

Eventually, Fine mentions *Pacific Ocean Blue*, Dennis's great, yearning 1977 solo album. Incredibly, Brian says he has never heard it. This revelation – he's seen eyes closed, rocking back in his chair in pleasure as he listens for the first time – along with the belated news of the death of Beach Boys manager and co-writer Jack Rieley, seems to mark some emotional breakthrough for Brian. If the past has often seemed a locked room, too painful for him to enter, he's now overwhelmed with sudden memories of love – the months in Holland, free of his father, recording fairy tales in Utrecht...

The journey comes to a conclusion at Carl Wilson's old house and Brian can't leave the car – "It's just too sentimental for me." The cameras keep rolling, though – Brian alone, staring bewildered at the car stereo as it plays "Long Promised Road", biting his lips, his eyes welling. It's a beautiful, uncomfortable, intrusive moment of intimacy that justifies the film: Brian's face a rolling symphony of turmoil as he communes with his dead brothers in ancient, immortal harmonies.



The life of Brian told once again: *Long Promised Road* (2021)

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES, EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO
PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Mike Love: positivity through Transcendental Meditation

# "I've never let myths and fallacies overwhelm me"

**_Uncut_ is granted an audience with Mike Love. "I said to Dennis, 'Why are you so uptight?' He said, 'I was just out at the ranch and I saw Charlie Manson take an automatic and blow a guy in half," hears MICHAEL BONNER.**

UNCUT MAY 2017

MIKE LOVE has returned to his Lake Tahoe home from The Beach Boys' latest run of Australian dates to find it has been snowing. "I've had this property since 1981, but I've never seen this much snow," he says. "It's unbelievable. We're not down on the lake, we're at a very high elevation – 1,000 feet up – and there must be 20 feet of snow on either side of my driveway. We have snow ploughs going just so we can drive in and out. Our road over the mountain, Mt Rose Highway, was closed for a few days, so we had to take all kinds of circuitous routes to get anywhere."

The idea of a Beach Boy battling with such volumes of snow is a strange one – especially considering how many of the band's earliest hits were predicated around the pleasures of sand, sun and surf. But Love is sanguine, despite the inclement weather. He is looking forward to the band's forthcoming European dates, including shows at the Royal Albert Hall in London in May. "Apparently they're sold out, which is wonderful," he says. But the fans in England have always been so incredibly wonderful."

**Will your much-bootlegged unreleased solo LPs, *First Love*, *Country Love* and *Unleash The Love*, ever come out?**
**Kevin Cooper, Bolton**

Some of those bootlegged things are partially finished, maybe not 100 per cent. Funnily enough, I've been working with [*producer*] Michael Lloyd. Just after we do a couple of concerts with the Pacific Symphony in Southern California, Costa Mesa, we'll be going into the studio with my band members [*The Beach Boys*]. Hopefully, we're going to finish up some of the things I started many years ago. There might be a song that pops up off *First Love* and *Country Love*, but more likely we'd work on the songs contained on *Unleash The Love*.

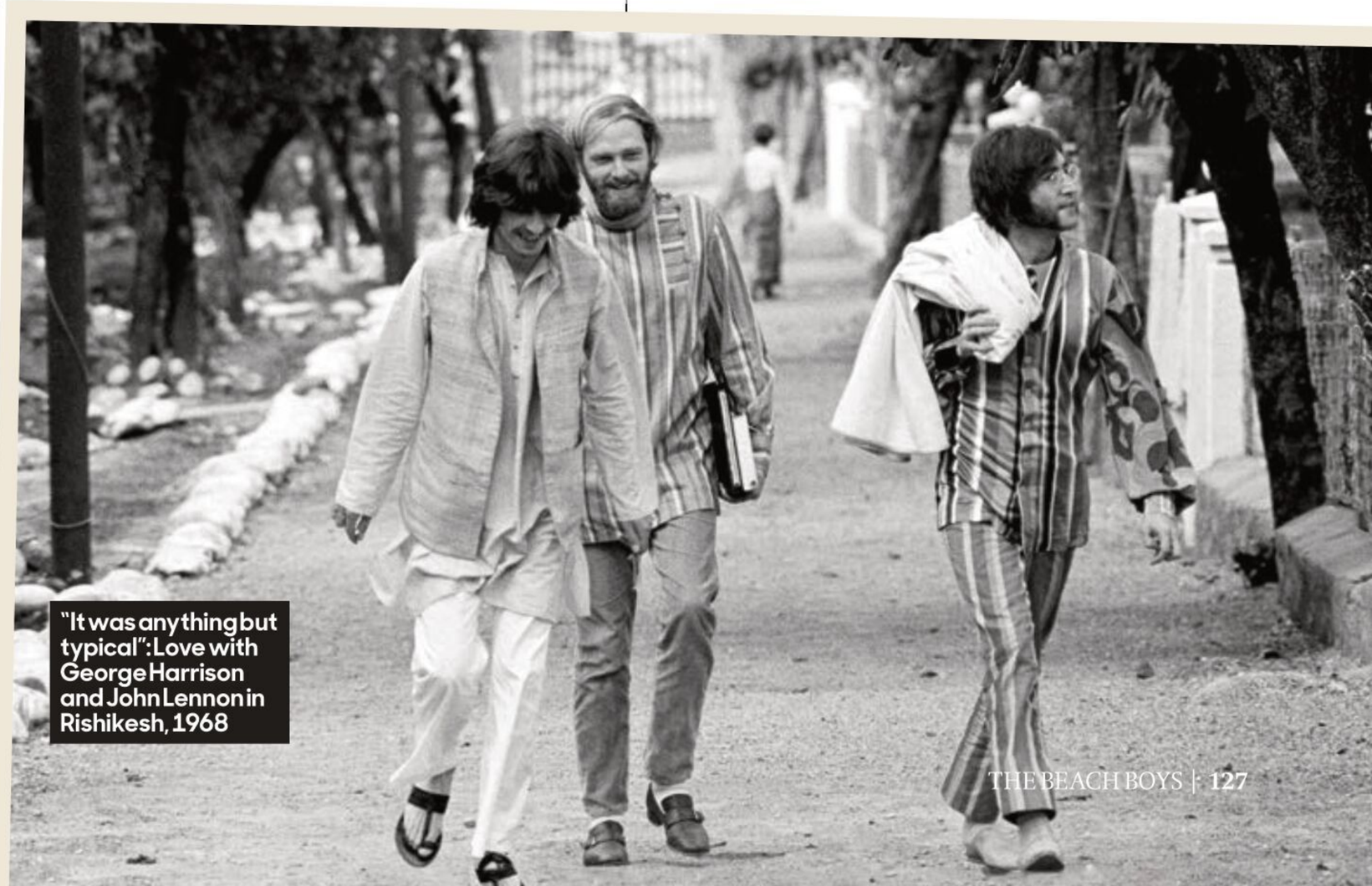
**Can you describe a typical day of the time you spent at Rishikesh, in February 1968, alongside The Beatles, Donovan and Mia Farrow? William Daymond, Wellington**

It would be difficult to call any day in Rishikesh a typical day! I had my birthday there, March 15. John, Paul, George and Donovan all got together with their guitars and wrote a song. It was dedicated to Maharishi's teacher, Guru Dev, but it ended up being a Beach Boys-style song, "Happy Birthday Mike Love". George gave me a painting of the Maharishi's master, painted by Maharishi's uncle. That was a birthday party. There was music, fireworks, sweets and cakes! It was anything but typical. Then there was the time Paul McCartney came to the breakfast table with his acoustic guitar playing "Back In The USSR"...

**"Warmth Of The Sun" is one of yours and Brian's most beautiful songs. Can you tell us about writing it?**
**Shireen P, via email**

Usually, Brian and I would sit down at the piano together. He would have a melody or a chorus and we would take the primary hand in doing concept and lyrics. For "The Warmth Of The Sun", Brian had just moved into his rental house, the family home had become too intense – living under Murry

UDO SPREITZENBARTH, BETTMANNW/GETTY IMAGES



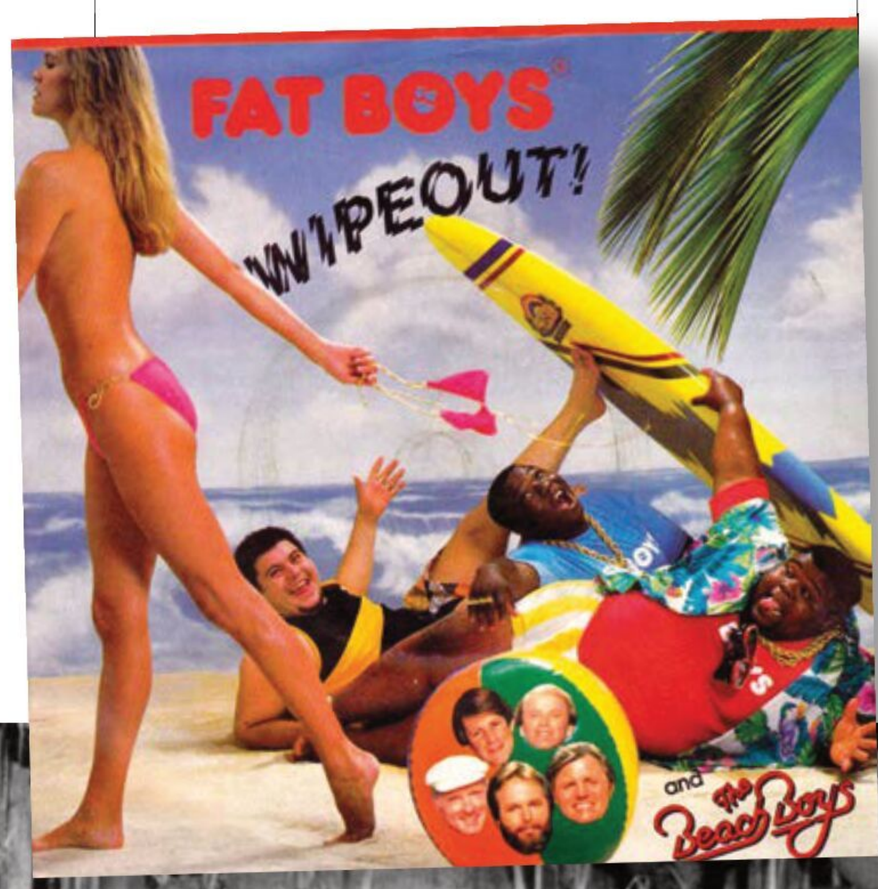
"It was anything but typical": Love with George Harrison and John Lennon in Rishikesh, 1968

Wilson's rule. There was such a haunting and emotional, almost mystical feeling about the whole writing session. The feeling I got was the loss of a love. The next day, we were woken with the news that President Kennedy had been taken to hospital. We recorded it about a month later. We were so shaken and touched by [*Kennedy's death*], I think that found its way onto the tape recording.

**Tell us a story about Al Jardine!**
**Keith Jones, Kent**
I remember going to his mum's house. We were looking for extra money to rent equipment to do our first session for the song "Surfin'". We actually sang "Their Hearts Are Full Of Spring" by the Four Freshmen – who my cousin Brian was obsessed with – to Alan's mother, who opened her purse strings after hearing us sing that song. We still do that song today. So I think Al played a really integral part, from the beginning, by prevailing upon his mother. That was pretty sweet!

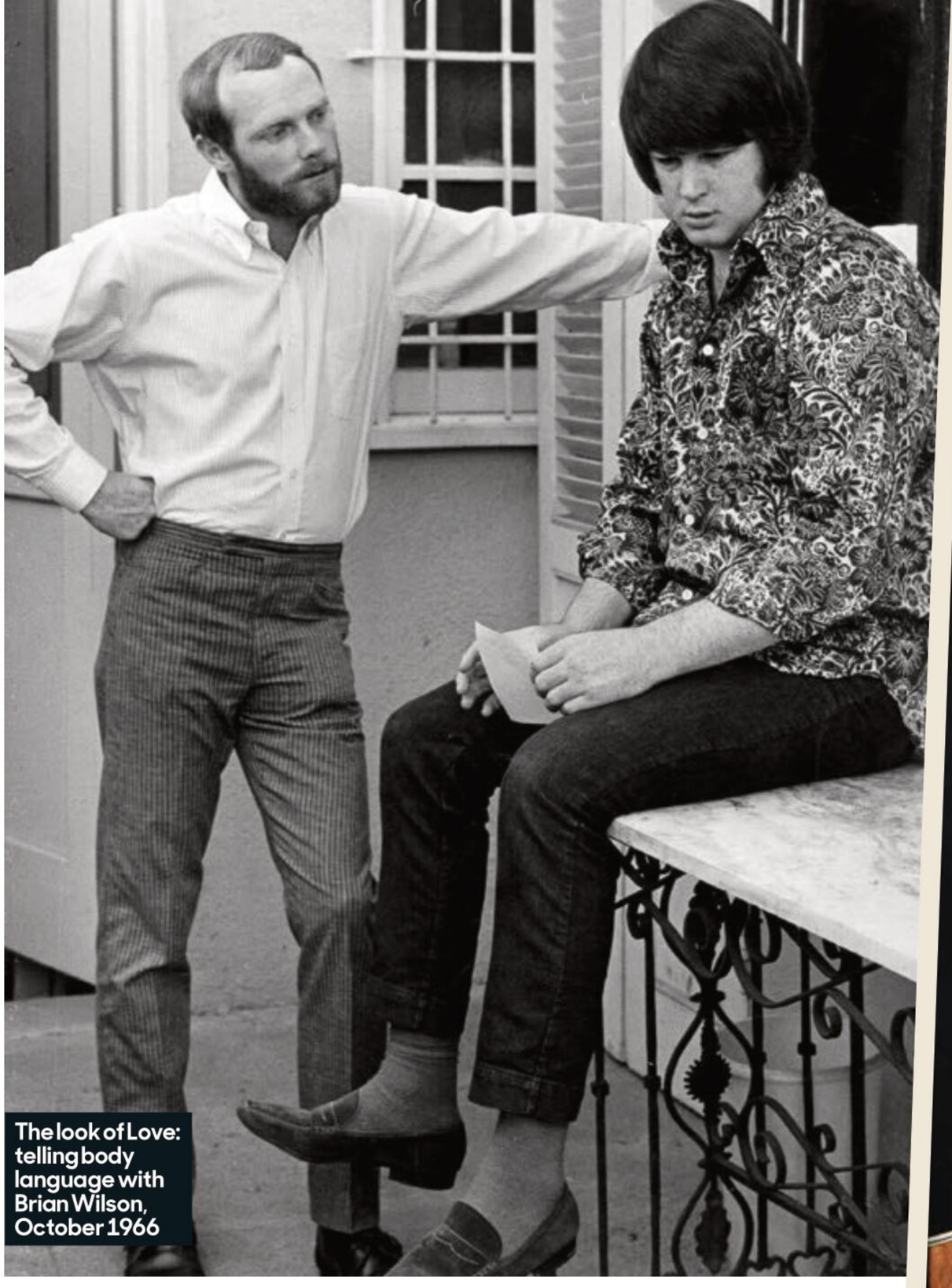
**Have you read Brian's book?**
**Peter Sharply, Leeds**
No, I haven't. Do I intend to? I don't think so. I'd rather just sit and have a chat with Brian and hang out, like we did in the old days when we were writing together. I haven't seen *Love & Mercy*, either, but the one thing I do know is that my character in that film was portrayed as objecting to some element of an instrument on "Good Vibrations" – which is made up. I was 100 per cent positive about "Good Vibrations". I came up with the chorus and wrote all the words. I was mischaracterised.

**How did the Fat Boys collaboration come about?**
**Gary Cottier, Plymouth, UK**
There was a fella named Eddie Haddad – a Hawthorne High School graduate, like Brian, Carl, Dennis and Alan. He aspired to a musical career, but he got more into management. He happened to know the Fat Boys' manager, who was a Swiss feller. We were in Houston and we met the Fat Boys and their manager and said, "Why don't we do a rap song? We'll do role reversals. We'll do the Kangol caps and the chains and the boombox, and they'll do the surf boards down at the beach." They were so big, they sank the surfboards into the sand! We did the art part in Times Square. It was hilarious. It was a No 1 video for a month solid on MTV.




RB/REDFERNS

Getting "a little intense" with Annette Funicello in the 1965 Disney film *The Monkey's Uncle*



The look of Love: telling body language with Brian Wilson, October 1966

Always kind to the Boys: Love with Donald Trump at the Mar-a-Lago estate, Palm Beach, Florida, March 1, 1997

**How closely was Dennis involved with Charles Manson?**

**Rick Salmon, Epsom**

There were things that were told to me by Dennis, just before the Manson murders at Cielo Drive. Terry Melcher had been leasing that house. He left and went to Europe for a short time. When he came back, he slept in his mum's place at Beverly Hills – Doris Day being his mother. But Dennis, Charlie and Terry had driven up to that house prior to Terry departing. Dennis tried to get Charlie a record deal, as Dennis felt Charlie had some interesting songs. He wrote some songs with him and, much to Charlie's chagrin, remodelled a song and we did it on TV [*"Never Learn Not To Love"*]. One time, it was just Dennis and I in the studio at Brian's house. I said, "Dennis, why are you so uptight?" He said, "I was just out at the ranch and I saw Charlie take an automatic and blow a black cat" – meaning a human being, a guy, an African-American fellow – "in half and stuff him down a well." It was a diabolical time.

**You are openly a Trump supporter. Are there issues you disagree with him on?**

**George Faulkner, via email**

I don't have anything negative to say about the President Of The USA. We did attend the inauguration. That was a moving experience. I understand there are so many factions and fractious things going on – the chips will fall where they may. But Donald Trump has never been anything but kind to us. We have known him for many a year. We've performed at some of his venues at fundraisers and so on. If he said something that was phrased in a way that was not so great, then like anybody else, I'd say, "Why did he say that?" But I'm not second-guessing him.

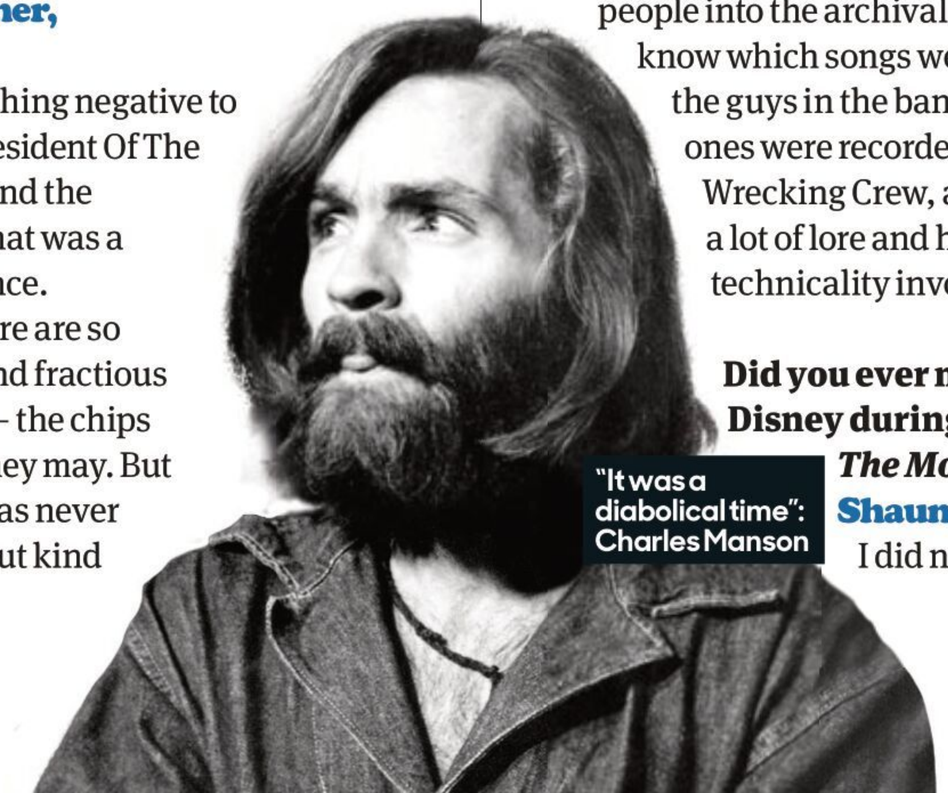
**"I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING NEGATIVE TO SAY ABOUT THE PRESIDENT OF THE USA"**

MIKE LOVE

**Few artists have been bootlegged like The Beach Boys. Are there plans to put out any of the *Sunflower* sessions, or the 'Landlocked' or the 'Adult/Child' recordings?**

**Zoran Tuckar, Zagreb, Croatia**

I have fond memories of the things we did on *Sunflower*. But the company that owns our masters, they're always looking for ways to put out editions, so who knows? Sure, any well-known group had a core of people absorbed in knowing everything about everything. The people into the archival things, they know which songs were recorded by the guys in the band and which ones were recorded by the Wrecking Crew, and so on. There's a lot of lore and history and technicality involved.



"It was a diabolical time": Charles Manson

**Did you ever meet Walt Disney during the filming of *The Monkey's Uncle*?**

**Shaun Phillips**

I did not. But we had a lot of fun doing that film. I remember doing the Monkey's Uncle – which was my form of the Monkey – with Annette [*Funicello*]. I guess we were getting down a little too much. See, Elvis was banned in Boston, and when he played *The Ed Sullivan Show* they wouldn't show him below the waist. We were getting a little intense with our monkeying for Disney!

**Has Transcendental Meditation made you a better person?**

**Peter Fors, via email**

It has allowed me to gain deep rest and relaxation and given me the energy, clarity and positivity to go forward in life. When you're attacked by people... maybe things are said about me that I never did – absolutely myths and fallacies – I've never let them overwhelm me. It's given me the strength to put them in perspective.

**Who was the best surfer among the band members?**

**Richard Zim, CA**

I'd say Dennis. Sure, I had a board. Alan Jardine and myself used to go surfing in high school and afterwards. Bruce Johnston still surfs to this day.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

RELEASED: JUNE 5, 2012

# THAT'S WHY GOD MADE THE RADIO

**Summer's gone, finally. A nostalgic, dignified, and ultimately rather moving entente cordiale.** BY DAVID CAVANAGH

## Critics' Verdict

"Ruthless schmaltz is, predictably, the order of the day on this first full-length meeting of the Brian Wilson and Mike Love factions since 1996's weird country effort, *Stars And Stripes Volume One*. Love is listed as Executive Producer, while Wilson (Producer) appears keener on AutoTuned vocals than one would've expected. The airbrushed nostalgia of the project is less of a surprise... and even Wilson's melancholy feels calculated. Nevertheless, recent Wilson solo albums have been no better and a few melodic passages still dazzle."

JOHN MULVEY, UNCUT, JULY 2012

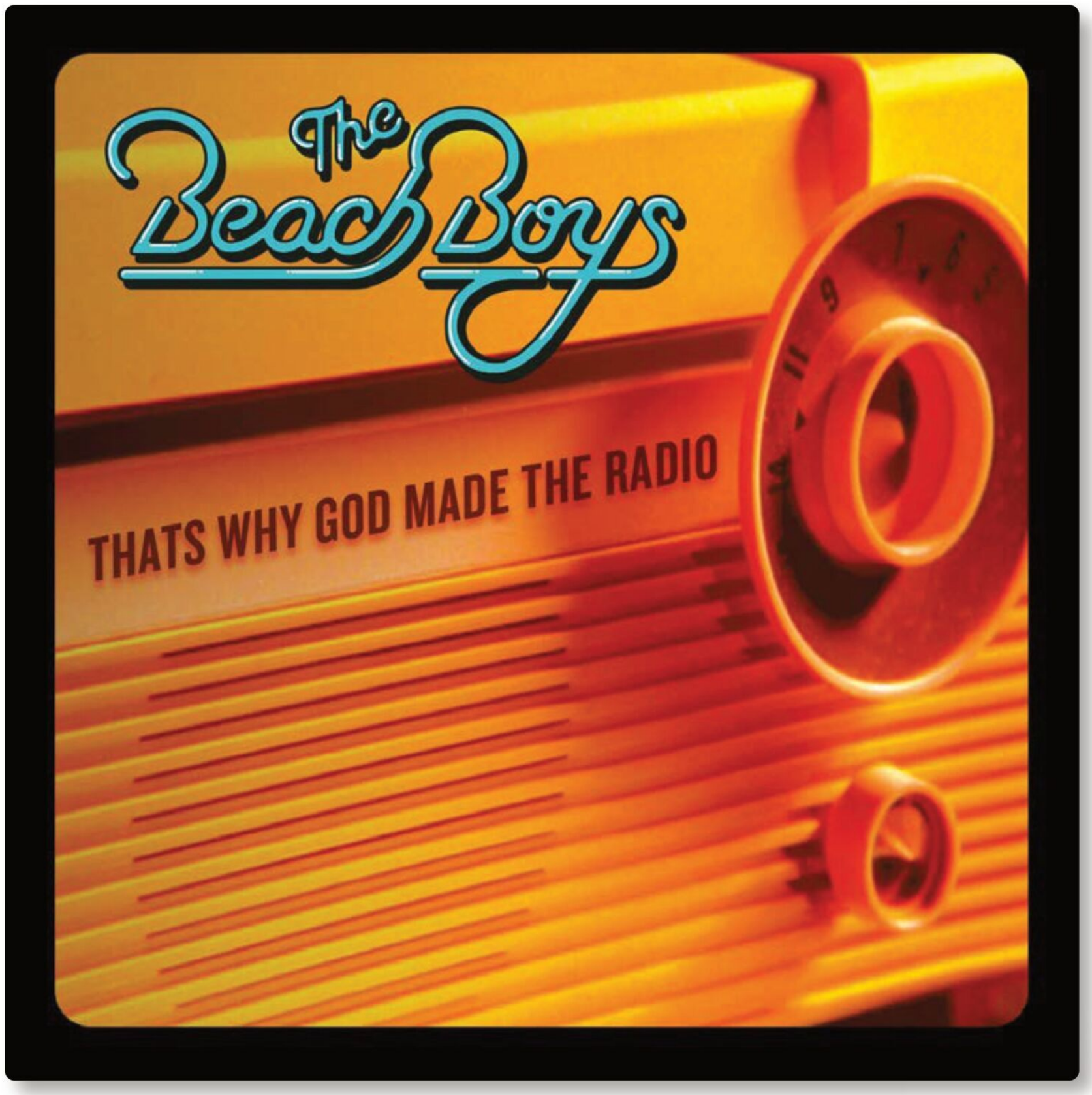
IT WAS DECEMBER 2011 when The Beach Boys announced they were setting aside their differences, recording an album and embarking on a world tour to commemorate their 50th anniversary. With uncanny timing, the news broke just as Barack Obama formally declared an end to the Iraq War. A new era of Beach Boys peace was upon us. "This anniversary is special to me because I miss the boys and it will be a thrill for me to make a new record and be onstage with them again," Brian told the media, sounding as if he were being operated by remote control. Then, going slightly off-message, he confirmed that he was looking forward to making a lot of money.

*That's Why God Made The Radio*, the first Beach Boys studio album in 16 years, was the first to involve Brian in any meaningful sense since 1985. It followed a long, dark period that saw Carl Wilson succumb to lung cancer (in 1998) and the surviving members split into three bands. One was Brian's. Another was led by Al Jardine. The 'official' Beach Boys were fronted by Mike Love, and featured Bruce Johnston and – intriguingly – guitarist David Marks, the toothy adolescent of 1962-'63, who'd re-emerged from nowhere to join the lineup again in 1997. Depressingly, as each of these three outfits sought to establish supremacy, the lawsuits flying back and forth by the end of the millennium resembled a scene from The Rutles' *All You Need Is Cash*.

We can only imagine the amount of horse-trading that went on behind the scenes in order for *That's Why God Made The Radio* to become a reality. Brian dominated the songwriting (with material he'd composed in the late '90s) and was listed as the project's producer. Mike Love received an executive producer's credit and managed to place a self-written song on the album ("Daybreak Over The Ocean") that he'd previously recorded in 1978 and 2005 for solo LPs that never came out. The number of backing vocalists and extra musicians, plucked from both Brian's touring band and Love's, ran into double figures. The loser in the negotiations was poor Jardine, given no writing credit and only one lead vocal ("From There To Back Again"). This despite the common wisdom that Jardine's singing voice is now the strongest of them all.

Against the odds, though, these uptight, seemingly irreconcilable men made a convivial, emotionally satisfying album. The early songs skipped along in a mood of rose-tinted nostalgia, with not-too-embarrassing verses and not-too-clichéd choruses. A feeling of relief washed over many long-suffering fans when the fifth track (Brian's "The Private Life Of Bill And Sue"), coming after the worryingly inane fourth ("Spring Vacation"), revealed an off-kilter playfulness reminiscent of "Johnny Carson" on *Love You*. Nobody was letting the side down by leering after babes in bikinis. The nostalgia seemed platonic and proper: wistful flashbacks to an uncomplicated time that had never quite existed in any of their lives. And the idea of paying homage to radio – a life-saving device sent to 1950s teenagers from heaven, which The Beach Boys had referenced in songs as far back as "Fun, Fun, Fun" and "Dance, Dance, Dance" – enabled them to sound both venerable and young-at-heart (*"Push-button heaven/Capturing memories from afar"*) as their fingers operated the in-car technology that nowadays make the golden oldies emerge from expensive speakers. Still cruisin', but perhaps with the radio not quite blastin' so loud as before.

Mindful of how radio might judge them in the era of Kanye, Brian controversially gave the green light for pitch correction software to be used on the 70-year-old Wilson, Love and Jardine voices, a move that condemned the album in some critics' eyes as a jarring misstep – or worse, as




incriminating proof that they should have retired years ago. To hear Jardine unceremoniously smothered in Auto-Tune was particularly sad, but it's possible that Brian, who is known to enjoy the sound of Auto-Tune in modern pop, may have insisted on it in a bid to sound contemporary. The Beach Boys walk like senior dudes, but still think like a corporate hit machine. Reviewers hailing the title track as their best single since "Sail On, Sailor" would have meant little to them. Seeing the album go Top 3 on *Billboard* – their first such achievement in 47 years – would have meant the world.

THE evils of Auto-Tune were redeemed, in any case, by the high quality of the four-song suite that ended the album. The mood became introspective, then melancholy, and eventually fatalistic. *"It's finally sinking in,"* sang Brian on a deserted beach somewhere. *"Summer's gone... I'm going to sit and watch the waves."* You could almost see him sliding deeper into his deckchair, slipping away like Dirk Bogarde at the end of *Death In Venice*. When the song was over, the sound of the ocean replaced it. Then that, too, faded away on the wind. The Beach Boys' endless summer as recording artists – that compulsive saga of harmony, tragedy, mental illness, internecine warfare, honour, dishonour and redemption – was finally over. Only a cold-blooded assassin or a senior policy advisor at the Department For Work And Pensions could have failed to have their heart melted.

The 70-city tour that followed was a resounding success, but it unwound gloomily with Mike Love's sudden announcement that he was asserting his legal rights to The Beach Boys' name for a forthcoming tour with Bruce Johnston, and that there was no place for Wilson, Jardine or Marks in this bleak vision of the future. The five men scattered to their respective camps, just as they had in the 1990s. Jardine currently fronts the Endless Summer Band with his sons Matt and Adam (but will be appearing with the Brian Wilson Band on the *Pet Sounds* 50th anniversary tour this year), while Love's Beach Boys are in the Far East in March and are scheduled to play US dates with The Temptations in August.

The outbreak of peace was preferable to an ongoing war. But it's almost certain that the last time Love and Wilson shared the same airspace was on the plane home from London in September 2012.

**AGAINST THE ODDS, THESE UPTIGHT MEN HAVE MADE A CONVIVIAL ALBUM**

## Trackmarks — THAT'S WHY GOD MADE THE RADIO

1. Think About The Days ★★★
2. That's Why God Made The Radio ★★★★
3. Isn't It Time ★★★
4. Spring Vacation ★★
5. The Private Life Of Bill And Sue ★★★
6. Shelter ★★★
7. Daybreak Over The Ocean ★★★
8. Beaches In Mind ★★★
9. Strange World ★★★
10. From There To Back Again ★★★★
11. Pacific Coast Highway ★★★★
12. Summer's Gone ★★★★

**Label:** Capitol
**Produced:** Brian Wilson
**Recorded:** Ocean Way Recording, Los Angeles
**Personnel:** Brian Wilson (vocals), Mike Love (vocals), Al Jardine (vocals, whistling), Bruce Johnston (vocals), David Marks (guitar)
**Additional Musicians:** Jeff Foskett (vocals, guitar), Adrian Baker (vocals), Christian Love (vocals), Hayleigh Love (vocals), Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter (guitar), Tom Bukovac (guitar), Jim Riley (guitar), Nick Rowe (guitar), Scott Totten (guitar), Nick Walusko (guitar), Probyn Gregory (guitar, banjo, French horn), Cliff Hugo (bass), Larry Millas (bass), Michael Rhodes (bass), Brett Simons (bass), Jim Peterik (ukulele, perc), John Hobbs (piano), Joe Thomas (piano, organ, harpsichord), Scott Bennett (organ, clavinet, vibraphone), Darian Sahanaja (vibraphone), Paul Fauerso (keyboard, percussion), Gary Griffin (accordion), Eddie Bayers (drums), Curt Bisquera (drums), John Cowsill (drums), Chad Cromwell (drums), Nelson Bragg (percussion), Joel Deroulin (violin), Sharon Jackson (violin), Peter Kent (violin), Songa Lee (violin), Julie Rogers (violin), John Wittenberg (violin), Alisha Bauer (cello), Vanessa Freebairn-Smith (cello), David Stone (double bass), Paul Mertens (flute, baritone sax, string arrangements), Chris Bleth (oboe), Skip Masters (radio voiceover)
**Highest chart position:** UK 15, US 3

# "We had to deconstruct ourselves... ...and start all over again"

**UNCUT** MAY 2016

THE Wilson residence, home to Brian, wife Melinda, their five adopted kids and several dogs, sits on a hillside descending from Mulholland Drive. The San Fernando Valley stretches out toward the mountain-ringed eastern horizon, and the house is large enough to be described as a mansion, understated in its immensity. A Google Maps aerial view shows the requisite aquamarine pool nestled in a verdant backyard. Like its neighbours in this gated community boasting a Beverly Hills 90210 designation, the Wilson family home is architecturally a homage to the region's Spanish heritage, with its white stucco exterior, red-tiled roof and balconies ringing the second storey palms and pot plants arranged around the grounds. A basketball goal has been erected on the left side of the property; a maid eases an SUV up the drive to the garage doors on the right.

A little girl bursts through the front door as a poodle guards the entryway, barking protectively at the sight of a visitor before retreating into a sun-dappled interior. The door stays open, revealing a vaulted central space. A near-life-sized giraffe sculpture looms over a chessboard in the living room, opposite a wide staircase. A landing at the top opens to the study. It's set up like a musical workspace, dominated by a grand piano, drumkit and keyboard. A cushion-y couch is set against the back wall and sunk deep into it is Brian Wilson, 73, dressed in patterned shirt and relaxed-fit trousers.

## *Uncut* meets with Brian Wilson on the eve of anniversary celebrations, and finds the Beach Boys legend in good spirits and on genial, if laconic, form. Ably assisted by band members past and present, Brian relives The Beach Boys' magical breakthroughs of 1966. "Youth," he tells **BUD SCOPPA** from the comfort of his sofa, "...is an awesome thing,".

BRIAN beckons me to sit to his left – his good ear side – in an upholstered chair. "I've got lots of questions," I begin, reeling off the topics: the impending *Pet Sounds* 50th anniversary boxset and tour, his upcoming book, *I Am Brian Wilson*, the excellent 2015 biopic *Love & Mercy*, his daily routine and his musical legacy.

**I tell him *Uncut* recently named *Pet Sounds* the No 1 album of all time in a critics' poll.** "Have we started the interview yet?" he asks.

**We have indeed. How does it feel to be the Beethoven of your time?** "It feels proud," he rapidly replies. "I am very proud of myself."

**Are you still interested in making new music?** "I might make an album later on this year."

**What's the concept?** "A tribute album to the great rock'n'roll artists like Chuck Berry, Bill Haley, Little Richard, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones..."

**That sounds intriguing. Who will you work with on the project?** "I haven't figured that out yet."

**Several of your recent records, including last year's enjoyable *No Pier Pressure*, have been produced by Joe Thomas.** "Right. Joe and I work together a lot."

**What is it about Joe that you like?** "His chords. I like the way he plays chords on the piano."

"He's monosyllabic with his responses – there's no dialogue, that's for sure", says Wondermints co-founder/guitarist Nick Walusko, who's been playing with Brian onstage and in the studio since 1999. "That's just been his style since the beginning. I've known him since '95, before we started playing with him, and he's always been the same, with these cool one-liners and zingers. But I think he's been like that since he was a kid. He was quick and witty, but he'd never go into detailed explanations of things; he'll let you decide what you think it is. Sometimes he does have these moments where he feels like talking about stuff and he's engaging, but if you come to him, that's very rare, especially if you're the 'official interviewer' – he knows he's wearing this hat now."

**Let's talk about the upcoming tour, Brian. You've said this will be your final tour of the UK and Europe. Why did you make that decision?**

"I don't know. I think that should be

**"I'M VERY PROUD OF MYSELF... I MIGHT MAKE AN ALBUM LATER ON THIS YEAR"**

BRIAN WILSON

The Beach Boys in 2012: (l-r) Bruce Johnston, Alan Jardine, Brian Wilson, Mike Love and David Marks

enough for us, you know?"

**Other than the nine scheduled dates in England, are there any other one-off shows in the works?** "We don't know. We're thinkin' about it."

Brian says he liked *Love & Mercy* and thinks Paul Dano, who'd spent a week with him in prepping for the role, "approximated my personality very well". He "hung out" with John Cusack, who also did a good job, although "he didn't look like me as much as Paul Dano".

**What people liked the most about *Love & Mercy* were the scenes of the *Pet Sounds* sessions at Western Studios in that cramped tracking room. Did filmmaker Bill Pohlad accurately capture the vibe? What was it like being jammed in there with all those musicians during the actual sessions in early 1966?**

"I gave them manuscript paper and they read the manuscript and they played their instruments."

**When you walked into Western on that first day of recording, did you know you had something really extraordinary?**

"Yeah, I knew when we were doing *Pet Sounds*, I knew we had something very special going."

**What was that first session like? Everyone must have been astounded.**

"Right. Well, we first did 'God Only Knows'". [*According to the documentation, the song was cut on March 9-10, 1966, near the end of tracking.*]

ROBERT MATHEU

**And how did they react to that?**

"They reacted good. They liked it a lot."

**Were there any foreshadowings on any of the previous records of what you were about to do on *Pet Sounds*?** "No."

**So this sound you'd cooked up was completely new?** "Right."

BRIAN is unequivocal on this point; he may well also be wrong. *Today!* and *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)*, the studio LPs that immediately preceded his masterpiece, released four months apart in 1965, feed directly into *Pet Sounds*. If *Rubber Soul*, *Revolver* and *Sgt Pepper* represent The Beatles' exponential leap, then the trilogy culminating in *Pet Sounds* does the same for The Beach Boys. They document Brian's transition from ebullience to spirituality, from the callow to the ornate, intimated in signature Wilsonian fashion in *Today!*'s "When I Grow Up (To Be A Man)".

"Do You Wanna Dance" and "Amusement Parks USA" open the two LPs, but they give way to "Please Let Me Wonder" and "Let Him Run Wild". For that matter, from the orchestrated arrangement to the musicians who played on it, "The Little Girl I Once Knew" (the commercially middling bridge single between *Summer Days* and *Pet Sounds*) would've fitted far more seamlessly on the latter album than "Sloop John B", the lone *Pet Sounds* track recorded in 1965, prior to the album sessions, and inserted, according to Al Jardine, its initiator, because Capitol didn't hear any hits.

Indeed, distinct hints of existential introspection are embedded the early surf-and-cars LPs in songs like "In My Room", "Surfer Girl" and "Warmth Of The Sun", and are voiced eloquently following Wilson's 1966 meltdown, from the 1971 stunner "Til I Die", to the Landy-years 1988 declaration "Love And Mercy", in which the "you" he's addressing is very likely himself.

**Why did you choose to set aside "Good Vibrations", rather than putting it on *Pet Sounds*?**

"Ah, we hadn't recorded it yet. We recorded *Pet Sounds* in early '66; recorded 'Good Vibrations' in November of '66," he recalls with seeming certainty, though the single was released that October.

"I thought it was ready prior to the release of *Pet Sounds*," says Al Jardine, who'll be part of Wilson's band for the forthcoming tour. "But Brian determined, for whatever reason, that it was not gonna be on *Pet Sounds*. As much as we argued for it, we couldn't seem to change his mind. There were so many iterations that it probably wasn't finished in his mind, and unfortunately for us, that song would've been the cornerstone of *Pet Sounds*, and I'd just assumed it would be on there. I was militant about it, as I'm sure Mike was, and the others.

"But it was his call and he just didn't feel it was ready. It would've catapulted that album into the stratosphere. We would've had a No 1 song right off the damn bat, not to mention that it fit

## THE BATHROBE SESSION

"DURING the '70s, our studio musicians – Eddie Carter, Daryl Dragon, Bobby Figueroa, Billy Hinsche, all our key guys that were on the road with us – they would come in, we'd bring the road gear in with us and start recording right in Brian's living room," Al Jardine recalls. "His bedroom was right upstairs, so he knew when we were there. Sometimes he wouldn't come down at all, and we'd have to go on our own musical tangent, and if he liked what he heard, he'd come down and add a couple of notes or an idea. One day, I was banging away on the piano on a cover of The Del Vikings' 'Come Go With Me', and, the music truck was there, but nobody showed up. Brian's upstairs somewhere, and no Beach Boys around. So I just started mic'ing the piano, and pretty soon I had made a track, and Brian called down. He said, 'Hey, that sounds pretty good,' and I said, 'Hey, would you help me with the horn arrangement?' Because he was obviously pretty good with brass and strings and stuff like that. So he put on his bathrobe – a big old black, diamond-studded bathrobe – we jumped in the car and went down to Sunset Sound and made up an arrangement on the spot, and we got ourselves a hit record. It was the kind of spontaneous combustion that happened with Brian every once in a while. And it got him out of the house, which was nice."

Cramped creativity: recording *Pet Sounds* at Western Recorders, LA, Spring 1966

the psychological profile of the psychedelic era – so many reasons that it's painful to discuss it. And we really had our work cut out for us after *Pet Sounds* to elevate our musical status; we had to deconstruct ourselves and start all over again. Brian wasn't emotionally ready for it, and I can't criticise him for that. His psychology was changing; he was obviously very sensitive to the lukewarm reception that the project got from Capitol. That would've spurred me on to get that mother on there – 'Look what we can do.' And it really fit the milieu. But that's just me."

**Was the album Brian made any different from the one he heard in his head when he was dreaming it up?**

"*Pet Sounds*? No, it was about the same."

**How did he manage to get it so perfectly out of his head and onto tape?**

"Well, I was pretty young, so I had it really pretty good."

**What was it about being 23 years old that made it easier for him to create?**

"Well, youth is an awesome thing, you know?"

**How does he feel now?**

"Not quite as good as I did," he says with a quick laugh.

Here's Brian quoted in a Capitol press release from the time of *Pet Sounds*: "This art form... can draw out so much emotion and channel it into notes of music in cadence. Good emotional music is never embarrassing... the stimulation I get from moulding it is like nothing else on earth. I approach my music-making as something pure from the spirit, to which I can add dynamics and marketable reality... I find it possible to spill beautiful melodies in moments of great despair... a lot of the songs are the result of emotional experiences, sadness and pain... or joy, exultation in nature and sunshine. I go to the piano and play 'feels'. 'Feels' are specific rhythm patterns, fragments or ideas. Once they're out of my head and into the open air, I can see them and touch them firmly. Then the song starts to blossom and become a real thing."

Eloquent descriptions of his music and creative process were commonplace until his meltdown. It's also believed that he was far less forthcoming after a 1967 story in *Cheetah* magazine by Jules Siegel recounting the aborted *Smile* project, which Brian felt was a betrayal of trust. In any case, he's rarely opened up since the late '60s.

Pointing at the piano, I ask Brian if this is where he writes songs. "Yeah," he responds. Could he come up with a song right now about what it's like to be at the 50th anniversary of *Pet Sounds*? "I don't know," he answers with a nervous laugh, making no move to get up from the couch.

I feel like I'm playing ping-pong with a guy who manages to return every ball with a tricky spin. How much of himself does he reveal in his stubborn unwillingness to reveal himself? Is Brian putting me on? Now and then over the years, Brian has thrown off his protective shell and discussed his travails with startling glibness and lucidity, notably in a 1991 interview on a Cleveland TV station and a 1994 *Entertainment Tonight* segment with daughter Carnie; both can be found on YouTube. An extraordinary 1995 interview, in which he rails at The Beach Boys and directly discusses the subjects of breakdowns, depressions, and how they've affected his creativity, can be found on page 114.

But for the past two decades, Brian has mostly lived his life in a comfort zone created by Melinda and represented by the laidback affluence of the home environment she's created for him, its soundtrack the barking of dogs and the laughter of children. He lacks nothing, and there's no pressure. After a lifetime of being pressured and put down by one bully or another – his father, Mike Love and Eugene Landy – he's loved, cared for and accepted for who he is, a gentle, damaged genius.

**You've spent the last 20-plus years with very little external stress.** "Right."

**Do you feel any stress at this point from any direction?**

"Yeah, I do. I feel a lot of stress."

**Where's it coming from?**

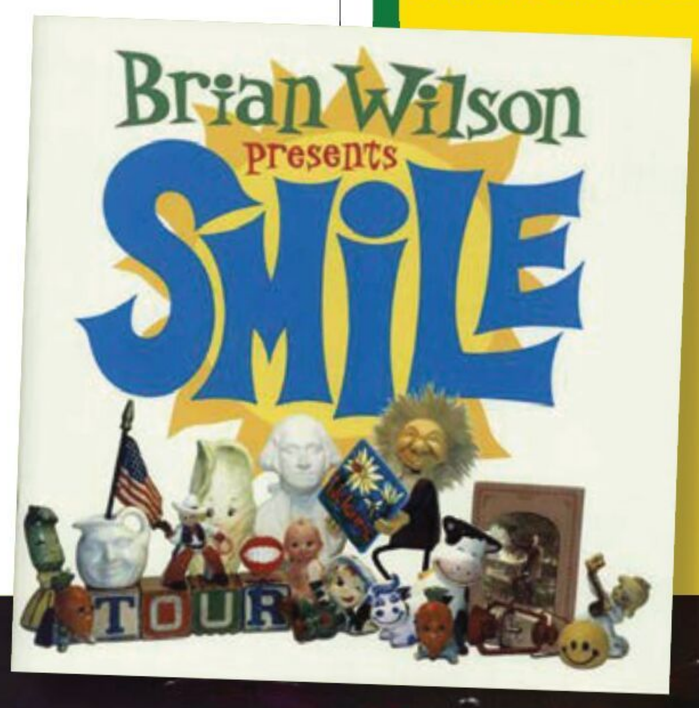
"I don't know. I just feel a lot of stress in my brain."

**Still, the absence of an adversary must have**

**"I JUST FEEL A LOT OF STRESS IN MY BRAIN"**
BRIAN WILSON

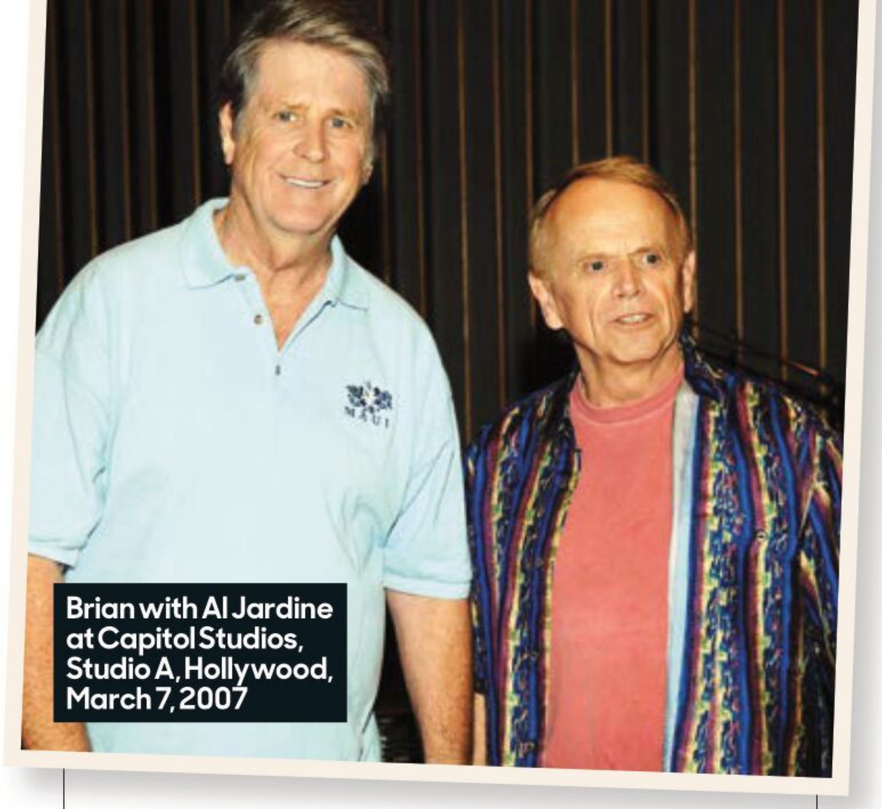
## PLAYING IN THE NEW CREW

"I NEVER forget that this is Brian Wilson, and I'm among 10 guys who are having him tell us how the song's gonna go," guitarist Nick Walusko says of making music with the master. "We're sorta like The Wrecking Crew in that way – we don't know what to expect. So he'll play us a song and start handing out parts, and the nice thing about Brian's stuff, on all the solo albums is, most of the time we do it old-school – live drums, guitars, bass and keyboards, with very few overdubs. That's how he cuts it and, for the most part, those are the takes you hear on the records, which is cool. Darian [*Sahanaja, Wondermints keyboardist and co-founder*] and I don't ever get jaded; we pinch ourselves to have this gig. After we finished *Smile*, I said to Darian, 'Do you realise? We knew *Smile* – we didn't read it off a page, we just knew the whole thing.' I'm not being self-congratulatory, but it's so weird that anyone would even attempt doing that."




MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, TIM WHITBY/WIREIMAGE

Brian encircled by his skilled backers on the Smile Tour, the Royal Festival Hall, London, February 20, 2004 *(Nick Walusko, second right)*


Brian with Al Jardine at Capitol Studios, Studio A, Hollywood, March 7, 2007

**dramatically improved your quality of life.** "Well, it just invigorated me, made me want to write more songs."

But he hasn't written a song in a year-and-a-half; the last two he wrote and recorded, he says, are "Shelter" and "The Private Life Of Bill & Sue" from the 2012 Beach Boys reunion set, *That's Why God Made The Radio*.

**Have you had the urge to write recently?**

"Not really. No, I haven't been inspired to write."

**Do you foresee writing music again?**

"Um, I don't know yet. I don't know."

**Who do you enjoy writing with the most?**

"I like to write with my own self."

**Do you miss making music?** "I do, yeah."

BRIAN the homebody is quite different from Brian at work, according to Walusko. "Every single time we've been in the studio with Brian, usually at Ocean Way, but sometimes at other places, he's pretty quick," he says. "It's not as if he's done his homework, but he pretty much knows how he wants it to be, and he'll play it for you, and at first you're thinking, how is that all gonna work? I don't think he plans it; I think it comes to him as just a natural progression. And for him, writing songs in the studio is just another form of writing. I know it's a cliché to say he uses the studio as an instrument, but even now, that hasn't really subsided – he knows what he wants, whether it's chords, percussion, vocal harmonies or other instruments that weave in and out.

"In terms of musical Darwinism, his success could be measured by his skill at adapting really quickly to an ever-changing environment, whether it's in the studio or pop music in general. Even early on, he was able to marry disparate genres. He took The Four Freshman and Chuck Berry and, as he says, BAM – he slaps his hands – 'I just put 'em together.' Brian did all that, and it's an iconic sound. I'm gonna tell you this from my heart: Brian took it to another level. He took a nice jet airplane and turned it into a spaceship."

**"EVEN EARLY ON, HE WAS ABLE TO MARRY DISPARATE GENRES"**
NICK WALUSKO

Along with eating at the nearby deli, Brian's daily routine involves walking for exercise in a local park. He does it every day, except when it rains. When he's home, he watches the news on TV; he used to watch movies, but not anymore. He doesn't read books; he doesn't read at all. He listens to '50s and '60s music on satellite radio. Friends rarely come here to visit him. Now and then he sits at the piano and plays "Rhapsody In Blue", his favourite piano song by his favourite composer, George Gershwin. I later learn that if Brian weren't required to be here for the interview, he'd be at his 11-year-old son's basketball game.

**Doesn't it get boring spending your days this way?**

"Boring? Never boring. No."

**What do you think about when you're not working?**

"I think about my friends and my group, The Beach Boys."

Brian says he hasn't read the shockingly revealing recent profile of Mike Love in *Rolling Stone*. When I say that Mike sounds like a very complicated guy, Brian responds, "Yeah, he's real... He's a great person."

**What's your favourite memory of Mike?**

"Working with him on lyrics. Writing songs with him."

**What was it like working with Mike again on The Beach Boys reunion tour in 2012?**

"It was great to watch him perform. I would sit at my piano and I'd watch him talk, you know. I really got off on his talking ability."

**The tour didn't end well. What happened?**

"The Beach Boys anniversary tour? It did not end... No." Here again, Jardine remembers it differently. "You'll have to ask Mike," Al answers ruefully, when asked how the reunion ended. "I don't know. He just decided he wanted to call it quits, and that's his prerogative. I would've loved for it to continue. We were just getting rolling." Instead, Love repossessed The Beach Boys brand, for which he holds the exclusive licence, and resumed touring under that nameplate.

**Brian was bitter after he was forced to pay Mike an estimated $2 million-plus in back royalties. Is he still mad about that?**

"No. We haven't talked for about three or four years."

**Does he expect to ever talk to Mike again?**

"I don't know. I have no idea... Hold on, I'll be right back."

Brian lifts himself off the couch with surprising suddenness – knocking my portable digital recorder to the floor – and hurries out of the room. Has he ended the interview? But he's back in a couple of minutes, explaining he had to go to the bathroom.

**Did you know that Mike has an autobiography coming out in October as well as yours?**

"No, I didn't know that."

**Isn't that a weird coincidence?**

"I don't know."

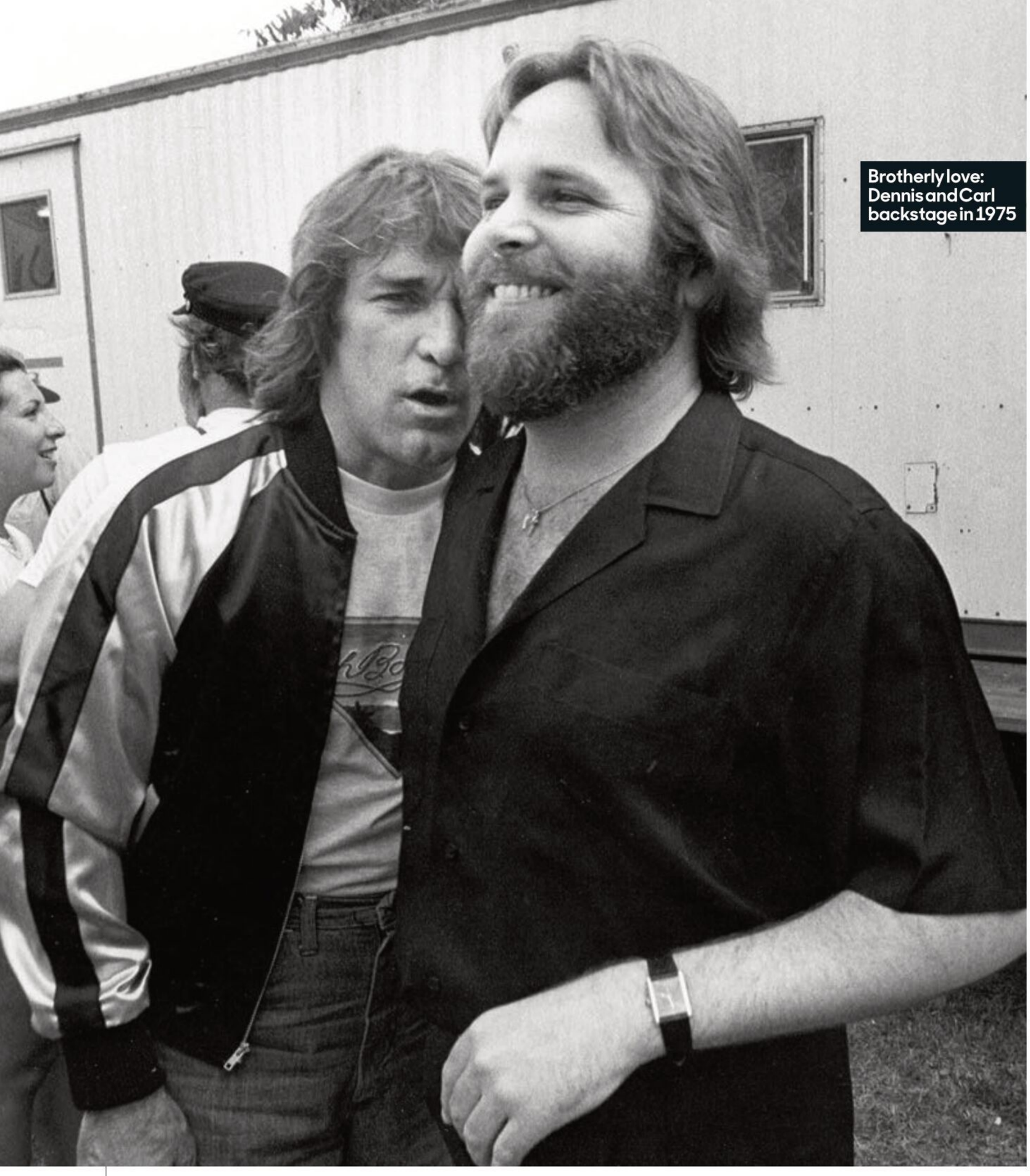
**Do you think that Mike still feels competitive with you?**

"No, I don't think he does. Nah. No."

Stacks of gold and platinum plaques lean

On the November 1973 US Tour: (l-r) William 'Blondie' Chaplin, Al Jardine, Carl Wilson and Mike Love

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES , LESTER COHEN/WIREIMAGE



Brotherly love: Dennis and Carl backstage in 1975

against the walls of the study, taking up every bit of floor space. At the front of one of these stacks is an oil portrait of his late brother Carl.

**That's a great picture of Carl. You must miss your brothers terribly.**

"I miss them both, my brothers."

**When you think about Carl, what's the first memory that comes to you?**

"I loved his singing; I thought he was a great singer."

**What about Dennis?**

"Great singer."

**What did the three of you do for fun when you were kids?**

"We'd go to the ocean."

**Which beach did you go to?**

"Playa del Rey."

**Dennis was the only surfer in the family, but did you like to go in the water?**

"Yeah, it was a thrill."

**Do you ever go to the beach now?**

"I haven't been to the beach for 10 years."

**Do you ever miss going to the beach?**

"Yeah, but I'm chicken to go in the water now."

BLONDIE CHAPLIN, a South African native from Durban who became a member of The Beach Boys in 1973 along with Ricky Fataar, his bandmate in The Flame, rejoined Wilson in 2013 after Joe Thomas called and asked him to do "some slight, easy singing, 'cos Brian would like to hear your voice," Blondie explains. "And that's what got me into the whole game again. I did some gigs two years ago and some gigs last year, and then I was invited to join the 50th anniversary tour. It's nice to have these young guys in his band take a shine to me; I can tell them stories and give them some perspective.

"Everybody knows about the old days, about this and that, but what I like about Brian right now is that he's really happy. He's happy with the music that he did before, he's happy to be doing it now and he's more animated onstage. I just go, fuck, yeah, thank you very much. And that's no bullshit, because I have a long history with these guys, and there's times you want to run away from it, but I look at him now and for the last three years, and he likes to perform, he likes his band and enjoys having everyone be part of it. That's what I'm seeing."

I ask Brian what he enjoys most of all about being on tour. "I like the concerts," he says. What does he do when he's not onstage? "I hang out in my hotel room." And watch TV? "Yeah." London is a great city; does he plan to see the sights? "I like Piccadilly Square. I've been to that a few times."

The old gang has been reassembled on this historic occasion – Al, Blondie and Billy Hinsche will also be on the Pet Sounds tour, extending Brian's comfort zone to concert stages around the world. Everyone who really knows him says that all he wants to do is make music, preferably in front of adoring audiences, and that's precisely what lies ahead, on this possibly final victory lap. "I'm fading," Brian tells me, 35 minutes into our scheduled 45-minute interview.

"OK. Bud, can you help me up?" he asks, extending both arms toward me. He's surprised me yet again. I stand up, brace myself, grasp his hands and pull him to his feet, whereupon he envelopes me in a gentle hug. When he releases me, I hand him a Sharpie, and he signs my *Pet Sounds Sessions* box.

"Have fun on tour," I say, heading for the stairs.

"OK, Bud," he says, with a quick laugh of apparent relief. "Bye-bye."

With that, Brian Wilson heads back to the TV room to watch the news.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, KEVIN MAZUR/MPL/WIREIMAGE FOR MPL

## FRIENDS: BRIAN & MACCA

"PAUL and Brian really have a deep mutual respect – it's not just a Hollywood thing", says Walusko. "They know each other from way back, and Paul hangs out with him every chance he gets. His favourite song is 'God Only Knows', and he played it onstage with us, jumping up and down, saying, 'I finally got to sing "God Only Knows" with Brian!' There are fringe benefits, playing with Brian. Pete Townshend, Neil Young and other legendary artists are like acolytes – they get down on one knee for Brian. They're musical equals, but they feel like he got there before them and he hit huge highs with the music."

Paul McCartney and Brian Wilson backstage at Coachella, the Empire Polo Field, Palm Desert, CA, April 17, 2009

THE BEACH BOYS ALBUMS

RELEASED: 1974–2017

# COMPS & LIVE

**Do it again, and again, and again! The ever-evolving world of Beach Boys compilations, and the unexpected treasures of their live recordings...** BY PETER WATTS

FEW BANDS HAVE had such an antagonistic, disruptive relationship with their own compilations as The Beach Boys. In 1974, with the band on Brother/Reprise and having recently released *Holland* to respectable sales, Capitol brought out **Endless Summer** ★★★★, a double LP full of nostalgia that blew *Holland* out of the ocean. Containing nothing from after *Pet Sounds*, it re-presented the band as a bunch of wholesome teens from the days before pop got weird. It sold by the sackload and effectively stuck cement boots on the band's creativity and contemporary relevance. This, it seems, was the only Beach Boys that America wanted.

It got worse. The record's success saw Capitol bring out a sequel, **Spirit Of America** ★★★, with an admittedly awesome cover, a couple of less heralded tracks but ultimately more of the old same. Narked, Warners/Reprise tried to counterbalance this with **Good Vibrations: Best Of The Beach Boys** ★★ in 1975 to compete with Capitol and show there was life beyond surf, but most of these 12 tracks came from Capitol's late-'60s output anyway. Then the Europeans got in on the act with **20 Golden Greats** ★★★★ in 1976, complete with shamelessly nostalgic surfing cover and entirely acceptable golden years tracklist that went from "Surfin' USA" to "Break Away" without ignoring the acid stuff – Europeans had always been much more receptive to the stranger material. It went to No 1 in the UK for 10 weeks in July 1976 and, while giving a short-term fillip to *15 Big Ones*, essentially rendered the band's current output meaningless on both sides of the Atlantic.

For Brian Wilson, this must have been painfully familiar. The very first Beach Boys compilation – **Best Of The Beach Boys** ★★★★ – had come out in July 1966, two months after *Pet Sounds*. Capitol had been spooked by the slowish sales for Brian Wilson's masterpiece; Wilson was stung by the betrayal and sabotage. A surf-heavy summary of the early days, the album was released in different versions in the UK and US. The US one, a huge seller, was singles-focused – albeit featuring tracks like "Wendy" and "The Warmth Of The Sun" – while the UK take was mildly more imaginative. Here was the first evidence of what would trouble Brian Wilson for so much of his life – his incredible new music wasn't taken as seriously in his home country by his bandmates, label or audience. Few bands have been forced to compete with their own legacy in such a direct way during their creative peak. It's something you could never have imagined happening to The Beatles and it must have hurt like hell.

> THE BEACH BOYS' OUTPUT HAS BEEN PLAGUED BY ODD RELEASES

**Best Of The Beach Boys Volume 2** ★★★ came out in 1967 to fill the *Smile*-shaped hole in the Capitol schedule. Again the UK version was longer and better, featuring songs from *Pet Sounds* as well as placing "Good Vibrations" on an LP for the first time, and subsequently giving a better approximation of where the band were. The US version, notwithstanding the likes of "Let Him Run Wild" and "Please Let Me Wonder", was still surf/cars/girls-focused. **Volume 3** ★★ came out in 1968, this time to make up for the poor sales of *Friends*, and had something of a bit of a pick-and-mix vibe to what was going on ("Good Vibrations" *and* "Surfin'"?; "Heroes And Villains" *and* "Frosty The Snowman"?), even if the UK version again tried to offer a more realistic appraisal with "Do It Again", "Wild Honey" and "Friends".

With *Endless Summer*/*Spirit Of America* dominating the latter half of the 1970s, it wasn't until 1981 that a new compilation of note appeared. This was **Ten Years Of Harmony** ★★★, released for the band's 20th anniversary and featuring the Brother Records era, making it the first compilation to not obsess over early Capitol songs. It contained several outtakes and unreleased songs, including "River Song" from *Pacific Ocean Blue*, "San Miguel", an outtake from *Sunflower*, as well as later gems like "This Whole World" and "Marcella". Almost as a spoiler, Capitol brought out **Sunshine Dream** ★★ to complete the *Endless Summer*/*Spirit Of America* sequence. This finally dared broach

THE BEACH BOYS ENDLESS SUMMER

BEACH BOYS
SPIRIT OF AMERICA
ONE WAY

GOOD VIBRATIONS
BEST OF

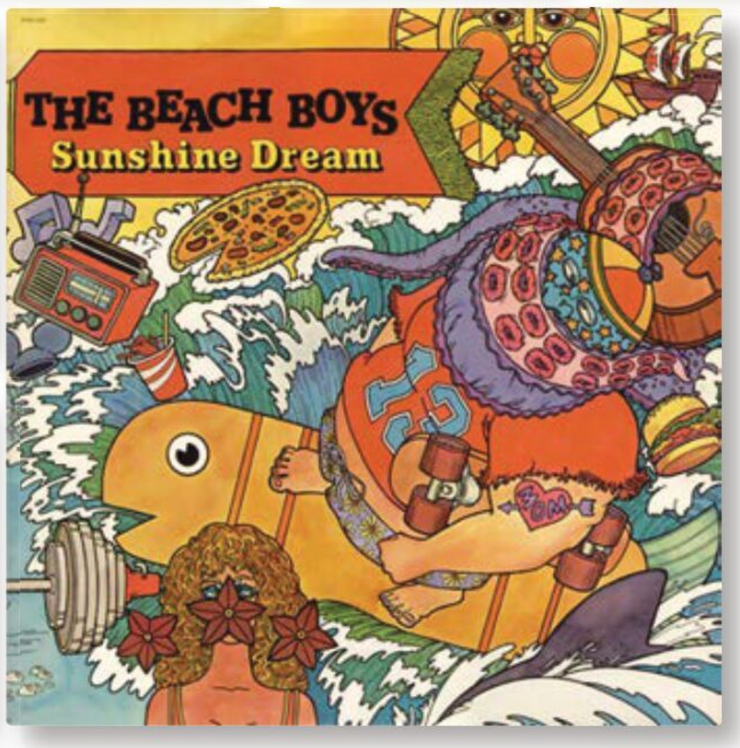
THE BEACH BOYS
20 GOLDEN GREATS

BEST OF
THE BEACH BOYS
SURFIN' SAFARI SURFIN' U.S.A.
LITTLE DEUCE COUPE FUN, FUN, FUN
I GET AROUND ALL SUMMER LONG
IN MY ROOM DO YOU WANNA DANCE
SLOOP JOHN B GOD ONLY KNOWS
HELP ME RHONDA CALIFORNIA GIRLS
BARBARA ANN YOU'RE SO GOOD TO ME

Best of the Beach Boys
Vol. 2

THE BEST OF THE BEACH BOYS VOL. 3

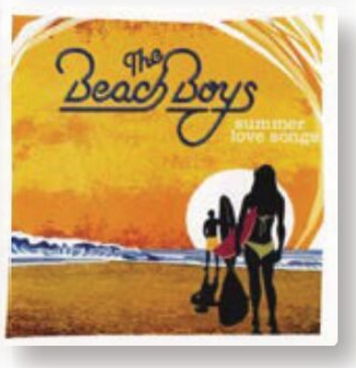
The Beach Boys


THE BEACH BOYS
Sunshine Dream

The
BEACH BOYS
An Ultimate Christmas

the beach boys
Greatest Car Songs

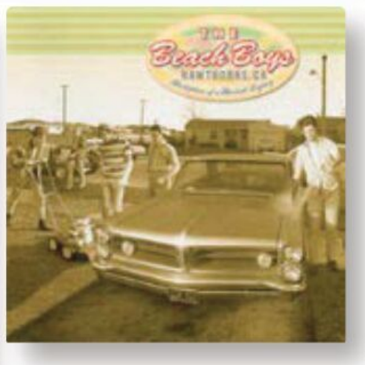
THE BEACH BOYS
Stack-o-Tracks


The Beach Boys
summer love songs

THE BEACH BOYS ENDLESS BUMMER
The Very Worst Of The Beach Boys

THE
BEACH BOYS
LOST & FOUND
1961-1962

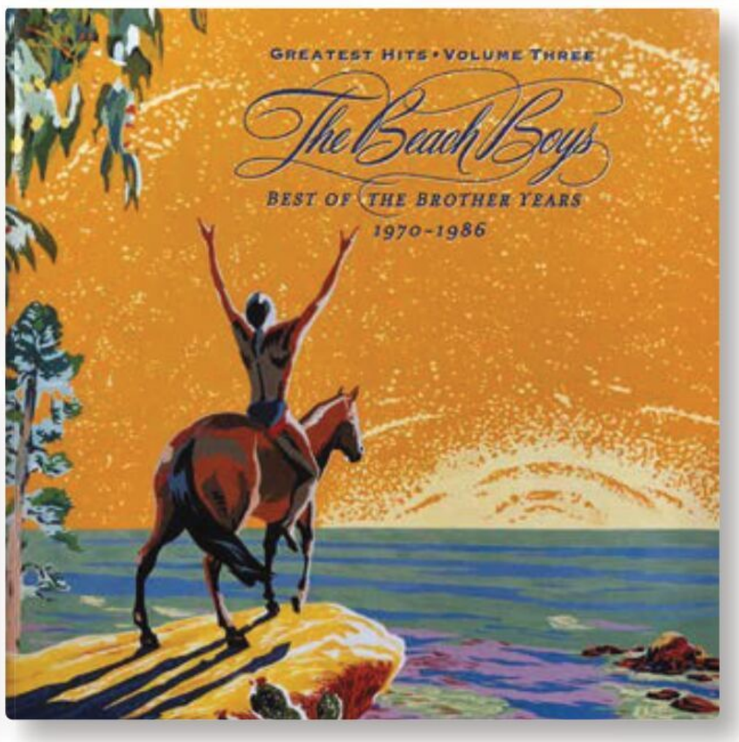
THE
BEACH BOYS
Endless Harmony
SOUNDTRACK


The Beach Boys

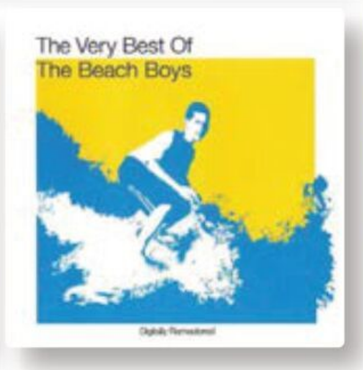
Beach
Boys

the BEACH BOYS
THE ABSOLUTE BEST VOL. 1

the BEACH BOYS
THE ABSOLUTE BEST VOL. 2

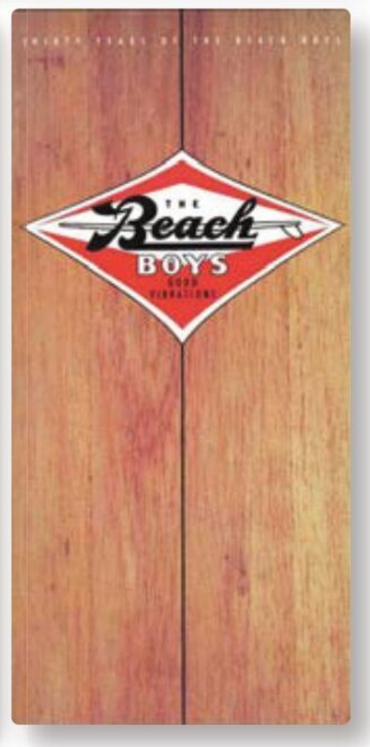

GREATEST HITS • VOLUME THREE
The Beach Boys
BEST OF THE BROTHER YEARS
1970-1986

GREATEST
HITS
The Beach Boys


The Very Best Of
The Beach Boys

the Beach Boys

THE VERY BEST OF
The Beach Boys
SOUNDS OF SUMMER


THE
Beach
BOYS

GREATEST
HITS
The Beach Boys
VOLUME 2

The Beach Boys
Classics
Brian Wilson

The Beach Boys
50
FIFTY BIG ONES
GREATEST HITS

the Beach Boys
US SINGLES COLLECTION
THE CAPITOL YEARS
1962-1965

BEACH BOYS
CONCERT

THE BEACH BOYS
live in london

The Beach Boys

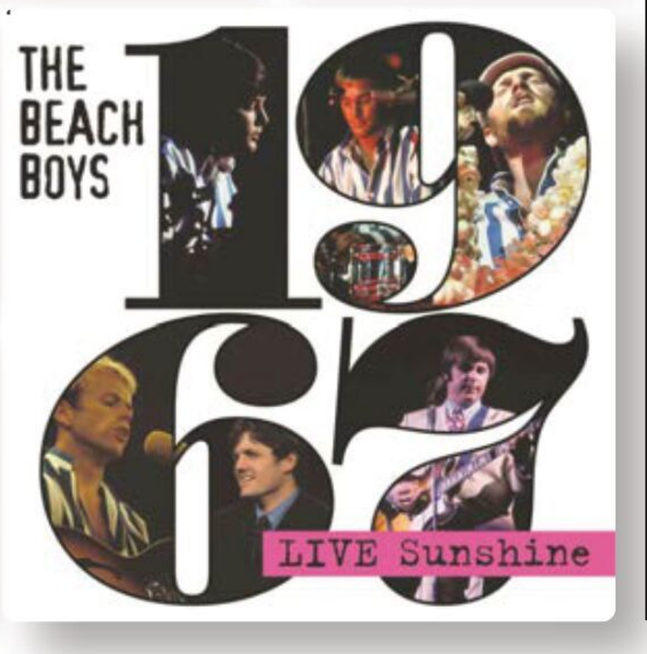
THE
BEACH
BOYS
LIVE IN
CHICAGO
1965

MADE IN CALIFORNIA
The Beach Boys

THE
BEACH
BOYS LIVE IN
SACRAMENTO
1964

The Beach Boys LIVE

THE BEACH BOYS
Graduation Day 1966
LIVE
at the University of Michigan


THE
BEACH
BOYS
1967
LIVE Sunshine

# THE BEACH BOYS ALBUMS

Brian's weird stuff and included oddities like "Vegetables" but also 1981's near insufferable novelty "The Beach Boys Medley".

Talking of which, The Beach Boys' output has been plagued by odd releases such as 1968's **Stack-O-Tracks** ★★, which featured 15 songs stripped of vocals, like some kind of analogue do-it-yourself karaoke set. **Ultimate Christmas** ★★ in 1988 compiled every Beach Boys Christmas song, including some from a 1977 abandoned Christmas album – *Ultimate Christmas* was reissued in 2004 as *Christmas With The Beach Boys*. In 2009, **Summer Love Songs** ★ was shoved out on the risible grounds that consumers needed a love-themed Beach Boys greatest hits album, 1992 having previously brought the motor-focused **Greatest Car Songs** ★★. Sadly, nobody has yet given such treatment to their songs about school or California. Best in this bracket is probably the spoof bootleg **Endless Bummer: The Very Worst Of The Beach Boys** ★★, which has kitsch appeal for fans of drunken singing, unwise adverts and Murry Wilson temper tantrums.

Genuine rarities started to appear in 1983, with, er, **Rarities** ★★★★, an ahead-of-its-time curio containing alternative versions of singles, Beatles covers, a German take on "In My Room" and standards such as "The Lord's Prayer" and "Auld Lang Syne". It's gimmicky but important and was reissued in 1998 on CD. The following decade brought 1991's **Lost & Found ('61–'62)** ★★★, the best of several comps featuring the band before they joined Capitol, using original master tapes and featuring demos and studio patter. In 1998 came the decent **Endless Harmony Soundtrack** ★★★, based loosely on the *Anthology* concept, which contained a mix of alternative versions, live songs and unreleased tunes like "Soulful Old Man Sunshine" and "Sail Plane Song", as well as Love's "Brian's Back" and Dennis Wilson's "Barbara". There was enough interest to call forth 2001's **Hawthorne, CA: Birthplace Of A Musical Legacy** ★★★★, a double CD of rarities – "Lonely Days", "A Time To Live In Dreams" – as well as interviews and chat. There's way too much of the latter, but it's fascinating to students of the band.

> MADE IN CALIFORNIA IS THE FIRST SET TO REALLY EMBRACE THE LATER YEARS

ALONG with this, the '80s and early '90s produced several more greatest albums such as 1986's **Made In USA** ★★★, which had a dreadful cover and two new songs, "Rock'n'Roll To The Rescue" and "California Dreamin'", while 1991's **The Absolute Best, Vol 1 & Vol 2** ★★★ are fine early CD releases. These have been supplanted several times, first by 1995's **The Greatest Hits – Volume 1: 20 Good Vibrations** ★★★, which offered three titles for the price of one. It's a fairly standard rundown, heavy on the surf, with a painful 22-year jump at the end from "Good Vibrations" to "Kokomo". **The Greatest Hits – Volume 2: 20 More Good Vibrations** ★★★ followed in 1999, with a greater focus on *Pet Sounds* and beyond, plus a handful of early songs. This trilogy was completed by **The Greatest Hits – Volume 3: Best Of The Brother Years 1970–1986** ★★★ in 2000, which shines a light on this usually overlooked era. The UK version has a slightly different title – *The Best Of The Beach Boys 1970–1986* – and includes three additional songs, including the disco "Here Comes The Night", confirmation that even now the UK market could handle a slightly different take on the band's legacy. In 2001, **The Very Best Of The Beach Boys** ★★★ tried to stick all this on one CD, albeit with only a handful of songs not from the '60s. It does a fine job given the restrictions. **Classics Selected By Brian Wilson** ★★★ from 2002, which includes one unreleased song – "California Feelin'" from 1974 – is worth digging out for Brian's sleevenotes and marginally off-kilter selections.

But the standout single-disc collection came out in 2003, when Capitol compiled **Sounds Of Summer: The Very Best Of The Beach Boys** ★★★★★, a great selection of 30 songs bookended by "California Girls" and "Good Vibrations". Interestingly, it sequenced them thematically rather than chronologically, and sold by the gazillion. It is still probably the go-to disc for anybody in need of a comprehensive sampler. In 2022, for the 60th anniversary, *Sounds Of The Summer* is now available as an expanded 6LP edition: featuring 80 newly remastered tracks with 24 new mixes and two first-time stereo mixes.

A sort-of companion, **The Warmth Of The Sun** ★★★★, followed, while a *Sounds Of The Summer* "platinum collection" edition brings it all together over three discs, competing with the fine 2CD **50 Big Ones: Greatest Hits** ★★★★, although at this point you might as well be looking at boxsets.

These began with **Good Vibrations: Thirty Years Of The Beach Boys** ★★★★★, a career-spanning Capitol boxset from 1993. A chronological take on the band career going all the way to "Kokomo", it included for the first time half-an-hour of music from *Smile*.

In 2008, **The Original US Singles Collection: The Capitol Years 1962-1965** ★★★ contained 66 tracks from the Capitol era in both mono and stereo, but the biggest career-spanning set of recent times is **Made In California** ★★★★★, which has six CDs and 60 songs that were previously

Carl Wilson at Knebworth, June 21, 1980 – the final major UK performance by all six Beach Boys together

PETER STILL/REDFERNS

The Beach Boys pose for a portrait in LA on May 1, 1987, a year before Brian recorded his first solo album

unreleased. It's the first set that really embraces the later years rather than treating them as an embarrassing adjunct, and also includes several live tracks from across the decades and a disc of outtakes, much of which is gold.

The live cuts on *Made In California* are a welcome introduction to an under-appreciated aspect of The Beach Boys' output – their uniformly strong live albums. **Beach Boys Concert** ★★★★ came out in 1964 and was the band's first US No 1 album. Capturing the early lineup in live performance for the first time, it's full of energy and the right amount of goofiness, plus great songs. The infectious quality is there from the start, and the album includes a terrific spin through oddballs like "Papa-Oom-Mow-Mow" and "Monster Mash" as well as early classics "Hawaii", "I Get Around" and "Fun, Fun, Fun". The 2014 reissue, **Live In Sacramento 1964** ★★★★★, puts the concert back in the proper order, with many extra tracks. Nice stage patter, too.

By the time The Beach Boys revisited the live format it was as a very different band. **Live In London** ★★★★, featuring a concert from the Palladium, was released in the UK in 1970 but didn't reach the US until after *Endless Summer*, when it was issued as *Beach Boys '69* in 1976, even though it was recorded in 1968 (are you following?). Despite the band's problems, this is a terrific record, with strong vocals ("Barbara Ann", "Their Hearts Were Full Of Spring"), beautiful selections ("Wake The World"), good musical performances, great sound, wit and genuine spirit. A minor gem.

Next came **The Beach Boys In Concert** ★★★★, a 1973 double album that went gold in the US, even though it was culled from two different tours. Now bolstered by Blondie Chaplin and Ricky Fataar, these additional voices give the band a surprisingly mature tone as they strike a balance between nostalgia and the present day, epitomised by the plaintive "Don't Worry Baby" and "Caroline, No". There's grandeur here, plus a dash of the era's singer-songwriter soul-searching, and they wear the material so well it's painful. By 1980, Brian Wilson was back and **Good Timin': Live At Knebworth England 1980** ★★★ is the last live document of the classic lineup. Again, it's good, by turns beautiful, sad and funny and features a touching "Happy Birthday" for Brian.

Recent additions to the live pantheon, coming from either end of the band's career, are less successful. **Live – The 50th Anniversary Tour** ★★★ is slick but overlong, capturing fine performances from 2012 when The Beach Boys were briefly on the same wavelength and the same stage. It's all a bit too choreographed and ultimately, given imminent fallings out, rather bittersweet. Following The 50th Anniversary Tour, The Beach Boys began copyright-ticking annual anniversary live album releases compiling bootleg recordings of full shows from each year of touring. **Live In Chicago 1965** ★★ is basically a reprise of the 1964 set but with too much screaming, worse sound, poor singing, some ugly joshing from Mike Love and, in hindsight, a rather horrible moment when Brian, briefly back on stage ahead of Glen Campbell, forgets his words in the middle of "Don't Worry Baby". Improved recording equipment, touring polish and the arrival of *Pet Sounds* and "Good Vibrations" makes for a richer Beach Boys experience by 1966. **Graduation Day 1966** ★★★★, from 2016, has them broaching complex studio arrangements that they didn't even play on, two shows from the University Of Michigan showcasing their evolution into a far more sophisticated outfit.

As *Pet Sounds* and *Smiley Smile* bedded into the set, 1967 was a key moment in The Beach Boys' development. The seven US shows collated on **Sunshine Tomorrow** (the expanded 2017 reissue of *Wild Honey*), later released digitally as **1967 – Live Sunshine** ★★★★★, then, are invaluable historical records.

## Critics' Verdict

"Sunlight and light. A happy selection from America's finest group in a second batch of hits that are testament to their originality and creativity."

MELODY MAKER ON *BEST OF THE BEACH BOYS VOLUME 2*, JULY 29, 1972

"The band's ability to take the blows and regroup in the face of adversity is the consistent subtext of this 2CD and digital collection featuring more than 50 previously unreleased tracks recorded between June and November 1967."

DAVID CAV ANAGH ON *1967 – SUNSHINE TOMORROW*, UNCUT, SEPTEMBER 2017

ARRY LANGDON/GETTY IMAGES

# ADD SOME MORE MUSIC TO YOUR DAY!

## The collectable Beach Boys

SO YOU'RE in a second-hand record shop, at some point in the past decade or two, casually flicking through the 'B's. And alongside Blondie's *Parallel Lines*, The Beatles, Byrds, Bee Gees and Bowie, you can't fail to notice a rip curl of dog-eared Beach Boys albums. Look! There's *20 Golden Greats*, *The Best Of Vols 1, 2 And 3*, *Endless Summer*, *Spirit Of America*, *Good Vibrations*, and that '80s one with the blonde in a bikini...

There is a point here. The Beach Boys sold a lot of records, sure, but many of them were 7" singles, and many, *many* were compilations.

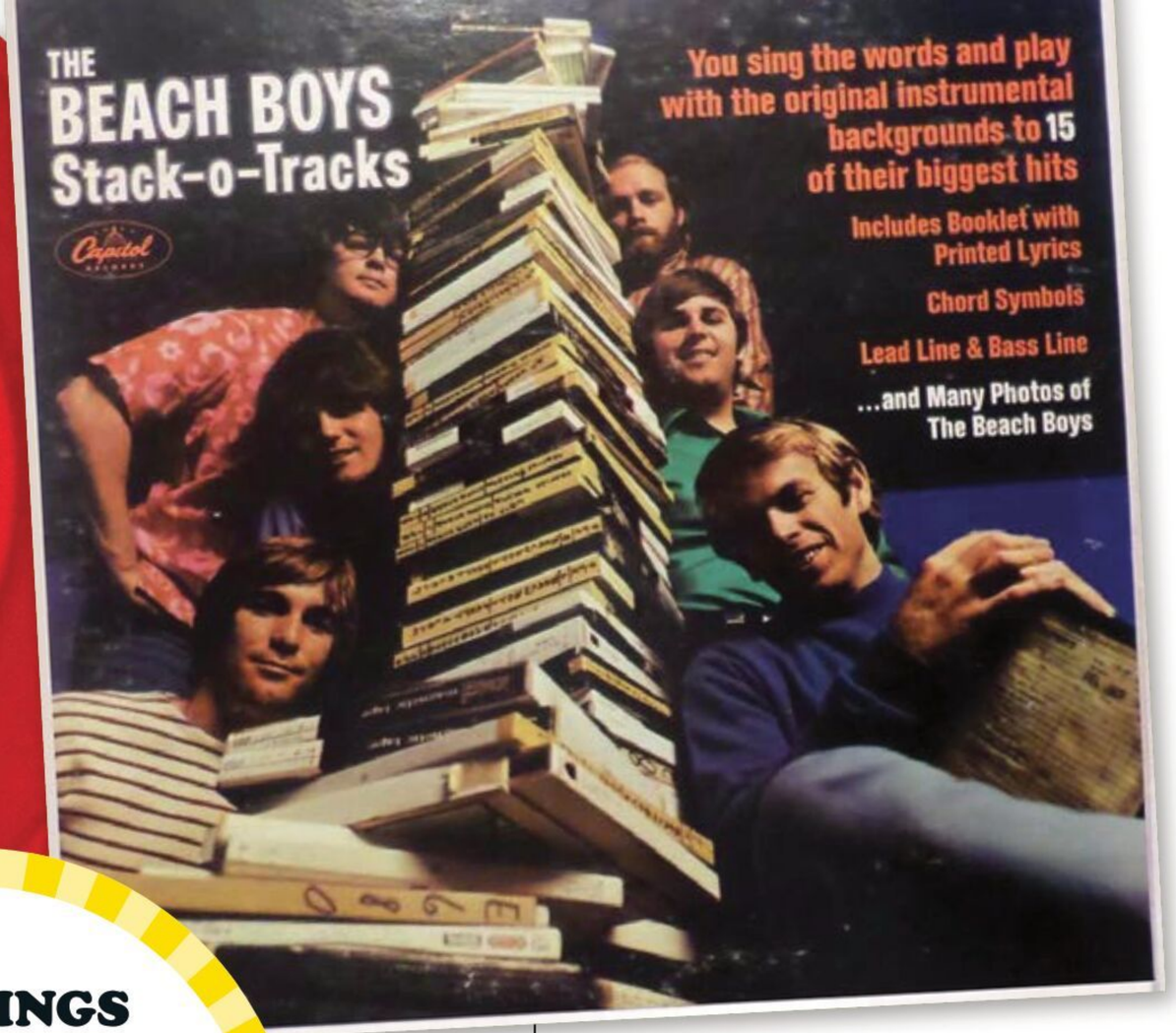
Their original audience, too, was not comprised of chin-stroking record collectors, but pop kids – boys and girls – who liked to play their albums over and over, on heavy-armed Dansettes. This means that great-condition issues of the original 1960s and 1970s albums are sought after. As one respected South London record-store owner once told *Uncut*: "The problem is not finding an original copy of *Pet Sounds*; it's finding one that hasn't been played to death."

And so it is that a decent-nick 1966 issue of **Pet Sounds** – with that beautifully archaic Capitol Records black/rainbow label – can be conservatively valued at £50. Better condition makes bigger money. This is the one everyone wants on original vinyl: a factory-sealed copy sold online in 2014 for £454, and a shrink-wrapped version sold in early 2016 for $861 (£690).

We have now come to appreciate the years from 1965 to 1973 as the boys' peak period, and original pressings of records from this time, while not really rare, are increasingly hard to track down in decent condition. Expect to pay a minimum of £15+ for a played-but-passable copies, either in a shop or online.

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/REDFERNS

Motor, Boys, motor: outside EMI House, Manchester Square, London, November 2, 1964




**PRESSINGS FROM THE BAND'S PEAK PERIOD, WHILE NOT RARE, ARE HARD TO FIND IN DECENT CONDITION**

Details make a difference. To double your money, you want **Surf's Up** with the textured sleeves and lyric sheet, or **Holland** with the bonus giveaway EP, "Mount Vernon..."

As a rule, the earlier albums are less common and have higher values: *Surfin' Safari*, *Surfin' USA*, *Shut Down*... really nice, clean copies have sold in excess of three figures. The original US 1968 *Stack-O-Tracks* – early songs, with the vocals removed – is pretty hard to find, too. We've seen that go for £70 and more.

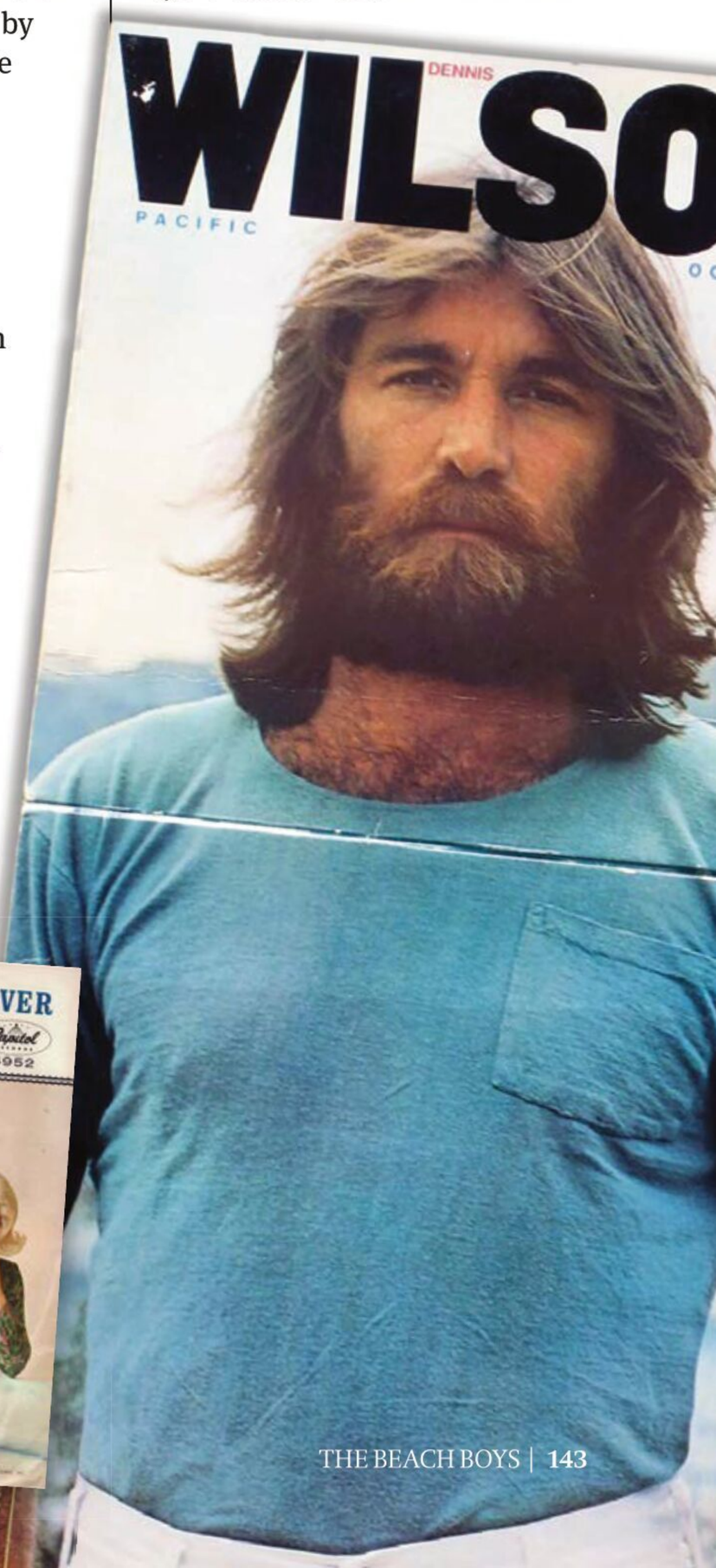
As with The Beatles, you want early albums in mono, and later albums in stereo. So, keep them peeled for a mono **Friends** or a stereo **Today!** (One note of warning: Capitol were always absolute fiends for a reissue – orange label Capitol albums are worth maybe half their original counterparts.) The post-*Love You* releases are still easy to locate, with **LA** an all-too-common find in the same record shop we were visiting in the first paragraph.

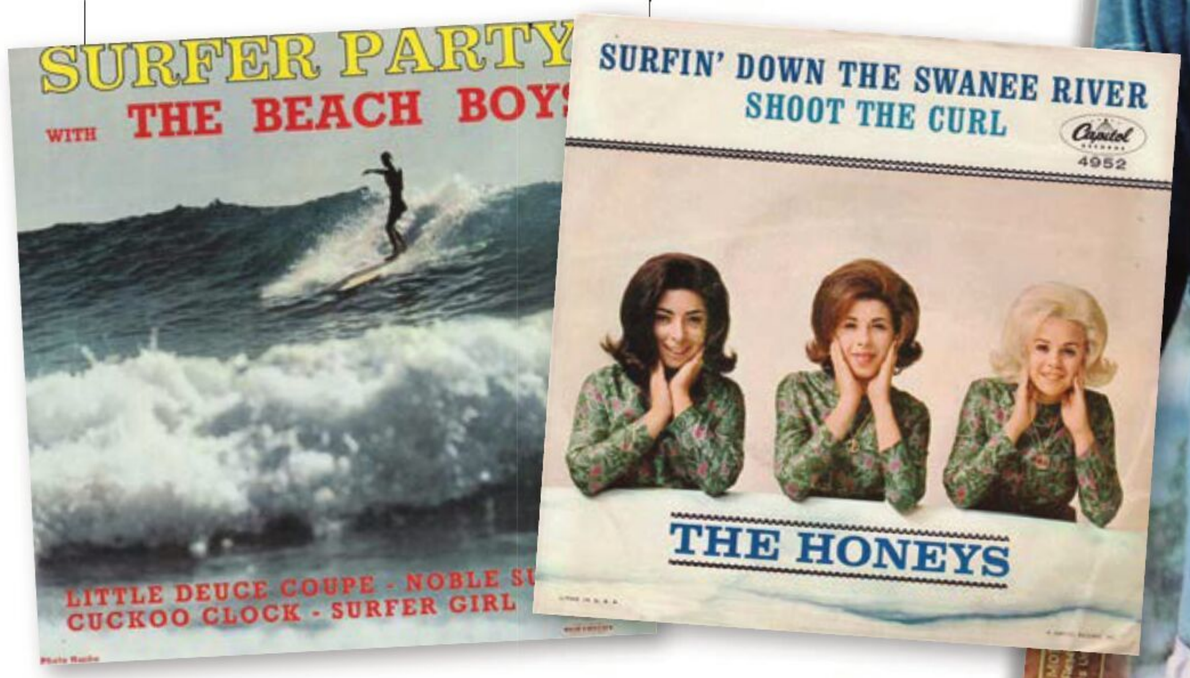
Don't discount more recent audiophile repressings, though. 180g vinyl issues and limited-release specials – like the limited 2004 **Brian Wilson Presents Smile** vinyl release, for example – can be worth more than an original 1967 *Smiley Smile*.

The early Beach Boys 7"s have a rarity value. Their first single "Surfin'"/"Luau" is a gold-standard $200 item. Other singles can be seriously desirable: a lovely copy of "Ten Little Indians"/ "County Fair" sold for £168 a few years back. In the UK, bigger hits like "Fun, Fun, Fun" or "I Get Around" sold by the camper-load, but standard singles can still fetch £10 or more. Higher up the collectability stakes come the cute '60s EPs such as "Little Deuce Coupe" – French, Spanish and UK versions of that can make three figures. And these prices are for shop-ready issues. Demos and test pressings will make more.

You'll note that none of these beautiful collectables make Beatle-matching values. For those, it's The Beach Boys diaspora: associated acts, one-offs, or releases with a strong BB connection. That would be the '62 Randy-label single "Barbie" by Kenny And The Cadets – here Brian Wilson sang lead and Carl, Al and the Wilsons' mother Audree delivered backup. The standard issue is worth maybe $600, the coloured vinyl over $2,000. A 1963 copy of "Surfin' Down The Swanee River" by The Honeys (featuring Brian's future wife Marilyn) sold for $3,600. And at £90, a mint 1972 *American Spring* is worth much more than a typical Beach Boys LP.

Dennis's solo work, in terms of value, outstrips his bandmates. An original 1977 *Pacific Ocean Blue*, while not commanding the wallet-lightening prices it once did, is still a deep down heavy collectable, especially in the blue vinyl version. Let's say £250? Rumbo's "Sound Of Free" single has made $500 for the yellow-sleeve Dutch issue, the Kiwi issue has sold for $450, and the UK version over £120. A signed *Pacific*... album with Dennis's signature carries a premium; his handwritten promo letters for the Caribou release have helped the album make $1,000+. Even the standard UK single of "River Song"/ "Farewell My Friend" can make £25. And for that, you can buy an awful lot of copies of *The Beach Boys' Greatest Hits*... *MARK BENTLEY*



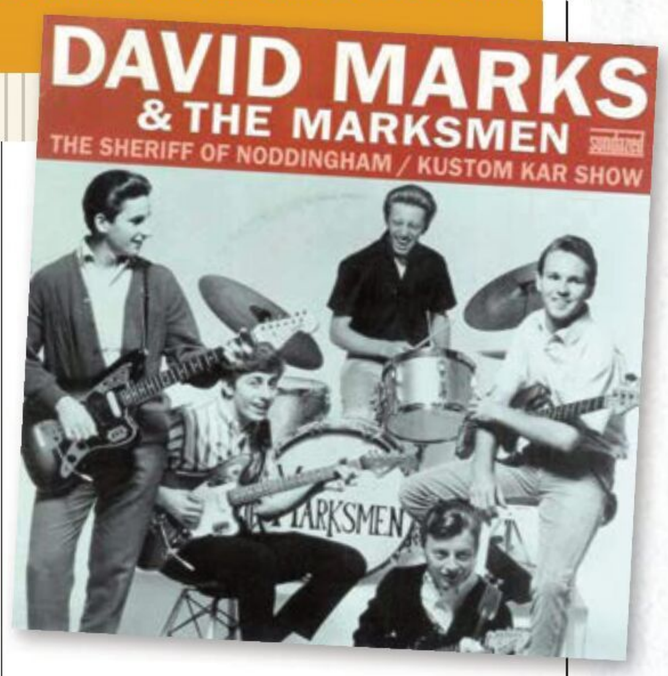



# THEY GOT AROUND

**The extracurricular achievements of the Beach Boys alumni**

## THE BOY WONDER
## DAVID MARKS

THE title of Marks' confessional autobiography *The Lost Beach Boy* suggests some Pete Best-like figure. But the guitarist, childhood neighbour to the Wilsons, joined as a 13-year-old in 1962, played on the first four albums and remained a legal member until 1967. It was a dispute with the fearsome Murry Wilson that precipitated his exit in early '64. Marks stayed in the ether, first forming The Marksmen (one of Herb Alpert's first signings to A&M) before performing with The Moon, Colours and Delaney & Bonnie – all before he was 21.

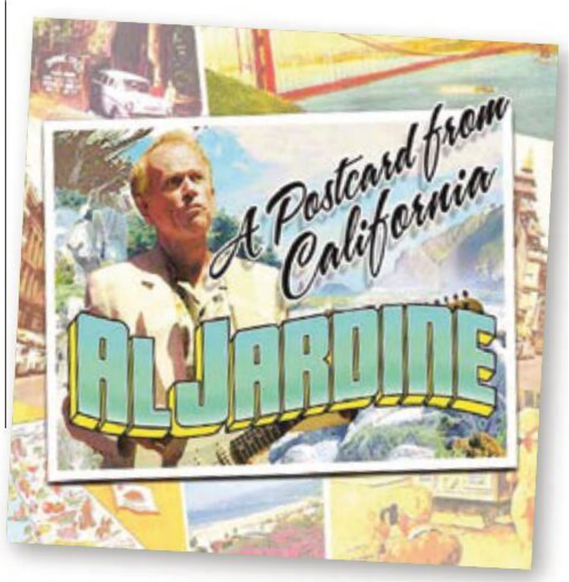



He took time out to study at Berklee, but a strong relationship with former bandmates, and longterm friendship with Warren Zevon, meant he was never far from the LA scene. His extensive sideman credits include work with Leon Russell, Jim Keltner and for actor Gary Busey. Carl's illness in the '90s meant Marks rejoined the band between 1997 and 1999, before a Hepatitis C diagnosis prevented further touring. The band's 50th birthday in 2012 saw him return once more, taking vocals on "Hawaii" and "Getcha Back" during the anniversary tour. He also plays on misty-eyed comeback *That's Why God Made The Radio* and Brian's 2015 solo set.

## THE RARE BEAUTY
## BRUCE JOHNSTON

THE title of Barry Manilow's US No 1 "I Write The Songs" is a double irony. Firstly, Manilow didn't write it. Secondly, it was penned by Bruce Johnston – who has contributed only a handful of material during his on-off five-decade tenure with The Beach Boys. He has serious surf-rock form, though: while still a teen, Johnston arranged and played on "Teen Beat" for Sandy Nelson, formed a duo with future Byrds-producer Terry Melcher and cut two solo albums (*Surfers' Pajama Party* and *Surfin' Round The World*). He joined The Beach Boys in 1965 as a bass/vocal replacement for Glen Campbell.

What he did write for the Boys was pretty great: Bruce penned peak-period classics "Disney Girls (1957)", "Tears In The Morning", "Deirdre" and "The Nearest Faraway Place". Disillusioned, he quit during the recording of *So Tough* in 1972, before delivering a fine solo album, *Going Public*, in 1977. At Brian's request, he reunited with the mothership in 1978, and has stayed with the band since, securing production credits on *LA* and *MIU*. In selected extracurricular work, he sang on Sagittarius' 67 baroque pop beauty "My World Fell Down", and composed vocal arrangements for Elton John and on Pink Floyd's *The Wall*.

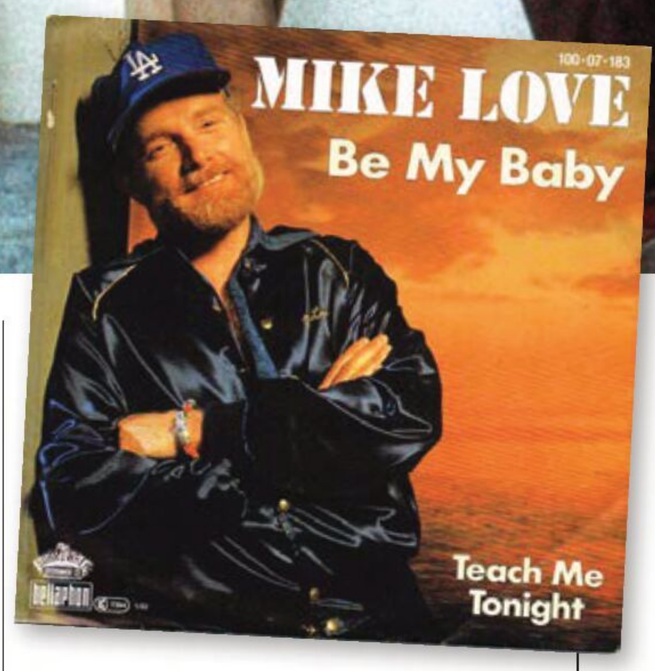



GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

## THE FAMILY MAN
## AL JARDINE

THE man behind "Don't Go Near The Water" and "Lookin' At Tomorrow (A Welfare Song)" has long-established sustainable credentials. Al Jardine moved to Big Sur in the early 1970s, where he studied environmental protection and, implausibly, began a career breeding Arabian horses. He built Red Barn Studios on his estate, where artists as diverse as the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Fleet Foxes and Steve Miller have recorded. He's been a focal point of the band's latter-period legal disputes; Mike Love brought a breach-of-title action against his fellow founder member over his touring project Beach Boys Family & Friends (including Matt and Adam Jardine, Carnie and Wendy Wilson and Daryl Dragon).

His two not-quite-solo albums are wildly different. The first, *Live In Las Vegas* (2001) is an onstage rendering of a range of Beach Boys material and good-time rock classics. His second is genuinely fascinating and historically important. *A Postcard From California* (2010, reissued 2012) was culled from sessions at Red Barn, and includes "Waves Of Love" – an unearthed demo with Carl on vocals – and material recorded over a 20-odd year period. That explains the presence of Brian, Glen Campbell, Neil Young, David Crosby, Stephen Stills and America – as well as long-time associate Stephen Kalinich, whose "Tidepool Interlude" has spoken-word commentary from Alec Baldwin.




## THE ACTIVIST
## MIKE LOVE

MIKE Love's role as the group's *force majeure* is well documented across these pages. He is, of course, one of the band's chief lyricists, and his rich bass voice is the keystone of the band's sound. But it is often his actions away from the recording studio that has gained our attention: from his espousal of Transcendental Meditation to boardroom debates and legal disputes over The Beach Boys trademarked name.

Let's stick to the music. His first solo album – 1981's *Looking Back With Love* – is a melange of Brill-Building material and other nostalgia-heavy cuts, including a Brian -produced take on "Be My

Going Dutch: (*l–r*) Johnston, Love, Jardine, Carl and Dennis in Amsterdam, February 1972

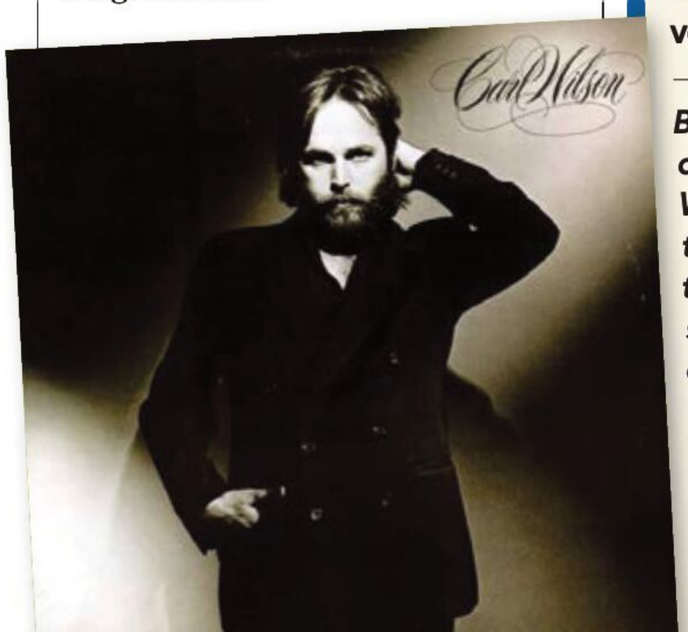
Baby", and a leftfield cover of ABBA's "On And On And On". Other releases include *Catch A Wave*, a 1996 interpretation of some BB classics , and two other rework albums with Bruce Johnston: 1998's *Salute NASCAR* (available only at selected US gas stations) and 2001's *Summertime Cruisin'*.

Love was a speaker at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, and has supported various charitable causes including the American Red Cross and the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation. That's why you'll find him on 2009's seasonal bash *More Hope For The Holidays*, a fundraising album that featured Weezer, Brandi Carlile and Creedence Clearwater Revisited.

## THE QUIET MAN
## CARL WILSON

WHILE none of Carl's albums can claim to match the majesty of *Pacific Ocean Blue*, the youngest Wilson's solo legacy is ill-served and overlooked. He was the band's unacknowledged rocker, and an underrated guitarist – but it is that pure, dream-like voice that characterises his best out-of-hours work. It was Carl who brought The Flames' Blondie Chaplin and Ricky Fataar to the fold; and Carl who delivered vocal backup for artists including Chicago, Elton John, David Lee Roth, and arrangements for Warren Zevon's beautifully arch "Desperados Under The Eaves".

It wasn't until 1981 that he cut his first solo album, and *Carl Wilson* is really too good to be left out of print. It mixes Eagles-ish MOR with Fleetwood Mac-like duets with Myrna Smith. The delicate, charming "Hurry Love" and "Heaven" are far, far finer than much of The Beach Boys' contemporaneous output. Now reissued, 1983's *Youngblood*, too, has some inspired moments. It features Nicky Hopkins and ex-Steely Danners Skunk Baxter and Elliott Randall, but is undermined by some unfortunate 1980s production. Posthumous release *Like A Brother* (credited to Gerry Beckley, Robert Lamm and Carl Wilson) rounds up some terrific '90s recordings, and has utterly sublime moments – notably the title track, a warming, tribute to Brian. We all know it: a well-chosen anthology is long overdue.




# "CARL GOT THINGS SHAKING..."

## Apartheid! Carl Wilson! Rented dogs! BLONDIE CHAPLIN remembers joining (and changing) The Beach Boys in the "transitional" early 1970s

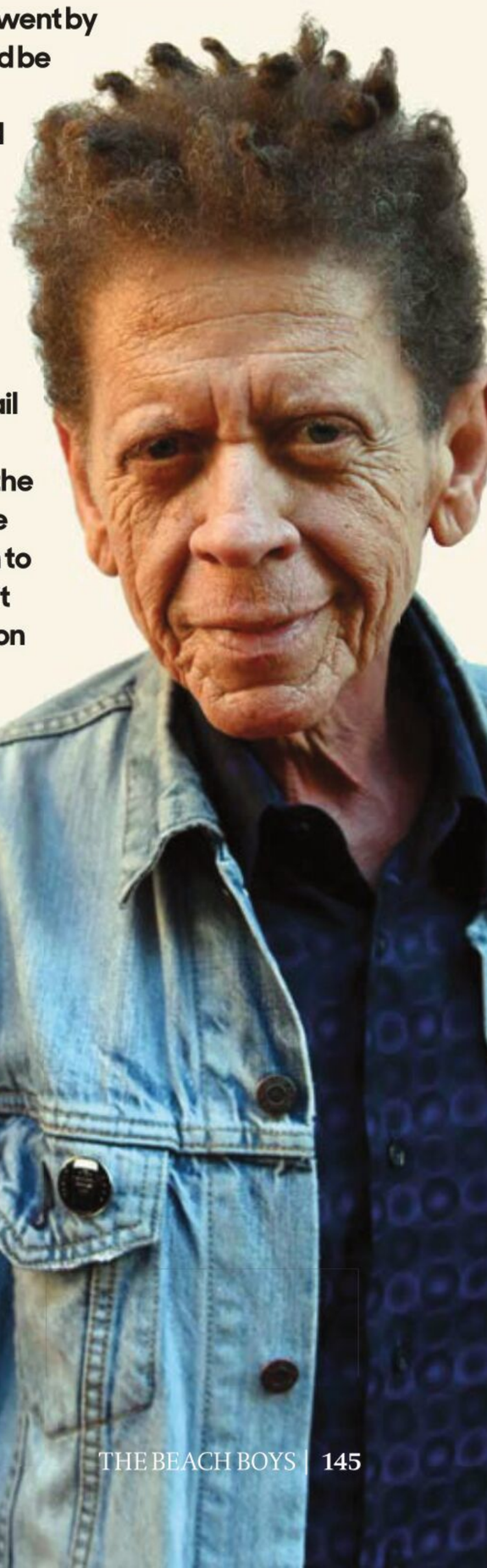
**BLONDIE CHAPLIN:** Carl was involved in the production of the final Flames album [*The Flame, 1970*] and he and Jack Rieley, the manager at the time made the suggestion to incorporate us with The Beach Boys. We were more of a rock'n'roll thing – but it wasn't that big of an adjustment, more, "It's a job!" When The Flames played at Blaises in London, the first person who came to see us was Al Jardine and he invited Carl.

Carl was coming into his own – he had a lot to do with keeping an eye on the productions and the music at that time, around *Carl And The Passions* (1972) and *Holland* (1973), he was very much involved. Ricky [*Fataar*] and I were close to him: I think he was getting some new blood in to kick it up a little bit. We brought a more West Coast rock feel. At times in the past Ricky and I's involvement was not acknowledged so much but now more people are getting into it. "Hold On Dear Brother" [from *Carl And The Passions*] was about one of The Flames, Brother Fataar: it was a tribute to him and to all our brothers. Especially the brothers in Durban, where we were from, because shit was hitting the fan real bad there. The Flames were one of the first bands of colour to go on tours, we went all over South Africa, Jo'Burg, to play. The Group Areas Act [*the South African segregationist law of 1966*] meant we couldn't sign autographs after a show, because the cops were there. We'd have to ask [*in Afrikaans*], "Sir, can I put my amp down and sign an autograph..." That was being a non-white rock band in that shit.

Making *Holland* was completely nuts. We all rented houses – Ricky's came with a Bösendorfer piano, mine came with a dog. The actual place we recorded was nuts: wires everywhere, completely makeshift. It was in this barn: when trains went by you'd hear the rumble in the studio. So we'd be like, "Time to stop singing now – the train's going by!" Then the rumble stops and we'd start again. It was chaotic but some of the music came out... it was good.

Nobody wanted to put *Holland* out unless they had something to push on the radio. When we came back, it was a question of making the best of the expense of what we'd done in Holland. "Sail On, Sailor" was done back in LA at Village Recorders: it wasn't a big economic hit at the time, it was more of a turntable hit – people were playing it on the radio. Carl had been to see Brian and he showed us the form, and it was Ricky on drums, me on bass and Carl on electric piano and I sang the vocal. It was a transitional time, and all The Beach Boys were involved, but what I see is that it was Carl who got things shaking. They were really looking for different stuff to build on. In the consciousness, these songs seem to have survived very well.

*Blondie Chaplin appears with Brian Wilson's band in the USA. He will be touring new music soon and hopes for a new release of The Flame album*



SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES

THE BEACH BOYS AFTERWORD

# "I owe a lot to my Beach Boy life..."

## Gentleman BRUCE JOHNSTON recalls surfing a 60-year wave

THE BEACH BOYS' magic was always part of my pre-Beach Boys life. As a guy who still is a surfing guy, I've loved it from the very beginning. In 1965 I'm working at Columbia Records, and I was consulted last minute by Mike Love to see if I could find someone to replace Glen Campbell, who had replaced Brian in April 1965. The band got red hot and Brian's job – happily – was to write, arrange, sing and produce and – the bad part – go on tour. He had several jobs and the pressure nailed him, he just couldn't do it any more. I hunted for two or three hours on the phone and finally called Mike back and said, "Look, I work at Columbia Records but at the weekend I could come down for a couple of days and cover for you for the two shows in New Orleans and Memphis." And that's how it all started. I knew all the songs, y'know?

All of a sudden I'm going at the speed of Beach Boys light. It was a fantastic ride to be part of. I made three albums the first 12 months I was in the band – *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)*, *Beach Boys' Party!* and *Pet Sounds*. I loved getting to watch Brian produce from the floor. My favourite memory of that was when I'd got a new girlfriend so I wanted to take her to one of the sessions. That session turned out to be "God Only Knows". Oh my God, it was so cool. It was pure music nirvana for me in the studio to watch Brian do stuff like that.

Brian was getting so much more sophisticated, musically, and he really got ahead of radio, he got too brilliant for it. It sounds like *Smile* initially overwhelmed him and a lot of people think that Mike Love sabotaged *Smile* – all you have to do is listen to the recording, and can you tell me the parts where he sang that was any kind of a sabotage? Brian was just going through so much psychological stuff. He'd get funky or angry or weird but he was a treasure to protect. Have you ever met a genius kind of person that's kinda normal? There's some kinda crazy thing in the attic driving them crazy. Maybe that's the price. I'm a happy guy, so I'm not a genius!

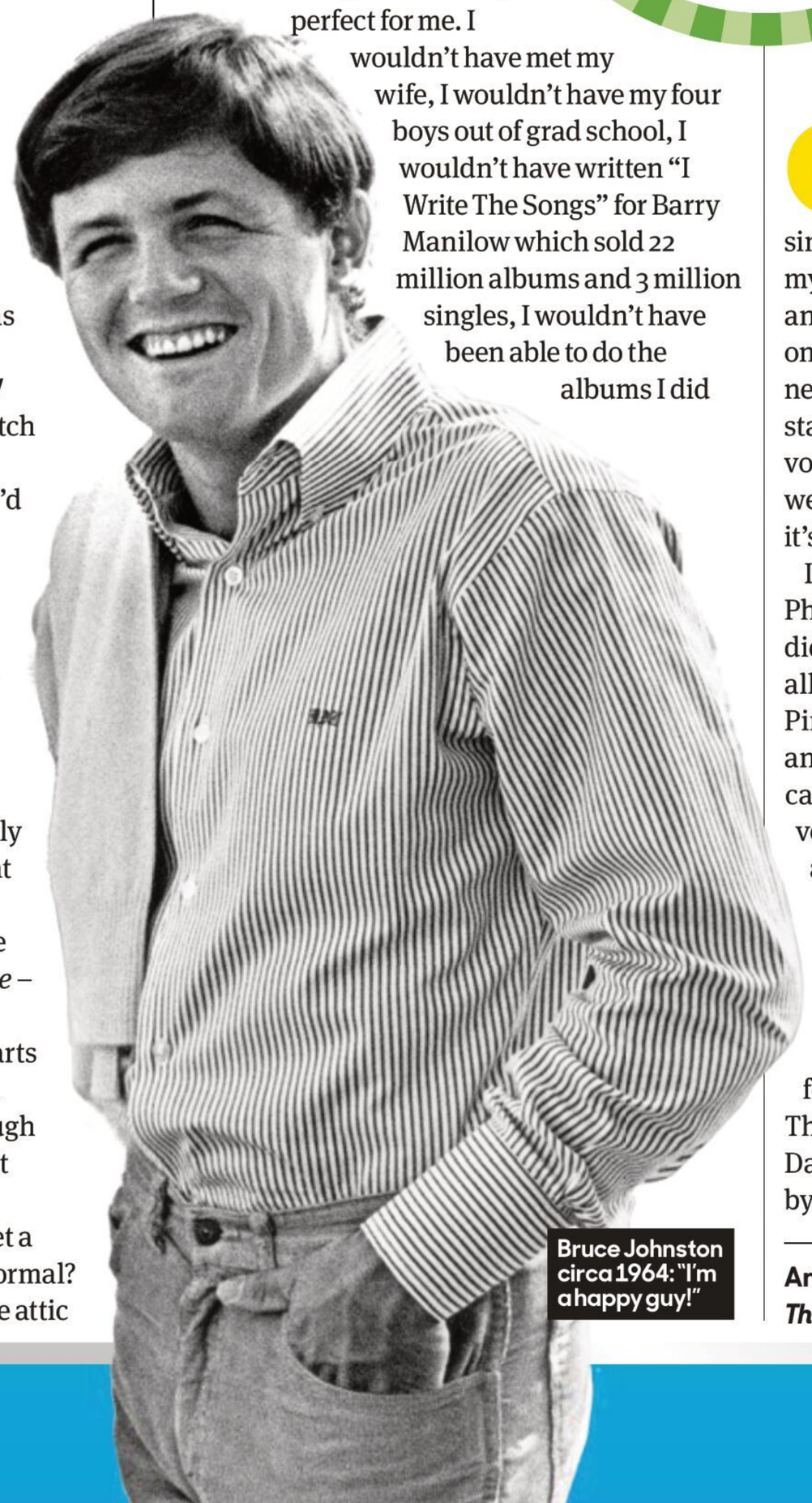
As Brian started withdrawing, I did not submit my songs. I didn't join The Beach Boys to start writing songs for The Beach Boys, I kinda thought Mike and Brian had it covered. I don't like being around drugs, though, and leaving in 1972 was the greatest thing. Jack Rieley [*the manager who had Johnston replaced*], I should give that guy an Academy Award for doing something accidentally perfect for me. I wouldn't have met my wife, I wouldn't have my four boys out of grad school, I wouldn't have written "I Write The Songs" for Barry Manilow which sold 22 million albums and 3 million singles, I wouldn't have been able to do the albums I did with Elton John or the vocal arrangements for "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me". I did so much stuff when I was home, it was awesome.

**"BRIAN GOT TOO BRILLIANT FOR RADIO"**
BRUCE JOHNSTON

Then in 1978 Brian called and said the band was late delivering a record, *LA (Light Album)*. I might have been the only person they knew who understood the music. I said, "Okay, I'll come down to Miami and I'll bring my housekeeper and my wife and my baby," and he said, "Okay". Then Dennis said, "Hey, Bruce, we're gonna go play in Alabama, why don't you get on a plane and come and sing with us?" It was that simple.

ONE of the outcomes of hanging around long enough is you get to sing in your real voice. I come in the band and I'm singing out of my range but I can do it. I'm using my Pee Wee Herman voice to sing high parts, and it sounds just fine. Well, as the years went on and on, and we lost Dennis and Carl and new guys came in on the road a little bit, I started singing more in my real voice. My real voice has been mothballed for so long I didn't wear it out. So I'm singing now full voice and it's pretty cool.

In the beginning I used to be in a band with Phil Spector, I used to back up Ritchie Valens, I did all the stuff in The Beach Boys' world, I did all this background vocal arranging, I did the Pink Floyd album *The Wall*. Then when we had another break with Covid, I wound up getting a call from Skrillex because he really liked my vocals on *The Wall*, and through that I wrote, along with Mike Love, a song on the new Weeknd album. A 79-year-old surfer doing all that stuff... I owe a lot to my Beach Boy life. The band's legendary standing is well deserved – thank you Brian, thank you Mike for writing, thank you Carl, Al, Dennis for sharing your vocals with everybody. Thank you for the surf guitar in the early days, David Marks. And thank you Bruce for stopping by and picking up the slack once in a while.



Bruce Johnston circa 1964: "I'm a happy guy!"

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

**An expanded edition of *Sounds Of Summer: The Very Best Of The Beach Boys* is out June 17**

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

# THE BEACH BOYS

Celebrating 60 years of a unique American band, we present the *Deluxe Ultimate Music Guide* to The Beach Boys. How the exceptional, vulnerable talent of Brian Wilson crested the wave of the surf craze, only to ride out into beautiful and uncharted compositional waters. *"I'm a leaf on a windy day/Pretty soon I'll be blown away..."*

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

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Prompted by his brother Dennis, Brian starts writing songs

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